COMMUNITY FIRST: IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING ACTION RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT: LESSONS FROM A NATIONAL COMMUNITY-CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), a major SSHRC-funded project, aims to strengthen Canadian communities through action research on best practices of community-campus engagement. We ask how community-campus partnerships can be done to maximize the value created for non-profit, community-based organizations in four key areas: poverty, community food security, community environmental sustainability, and reducing violence against women.

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Lakehead University
FSC RAD Food Secure Canada Réseau pour une alimentation durable
TRENT UNIVERSITY
OETN OTTAWA ECO-TALENT NETWORK
Centre for Studies on Poverty & Social Citizenship
Carleton University
Trent Community Research Centre
CAEFS
Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa
Canadian Alliance for Comunity Service Learning
l'Alliance canadienne pour l'apprentissage par le service communautaire
vibrantcommunities CANADA
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
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Canada

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Abstract

While many studies have addressed the successes and challenges of participatory action research, few have documented how community campus engagement (CCE) works and how partnerships can be designed for strong community impact. This paper responds to increasing calls for 'community first' approaches to CCE. Our analysis draws on experiences and research from Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), a collaborative action research project that ran from 2012-2020 in Canada and aimed to better understand how community-campus partnerships might be designed and implemented to maximize the value for community-based organizations. As five of the project's co-leads, we reflect on our experiences, drawing on research and practice in three of CFICE's thematic hubs (food sovereignty, poverty reduction, and community environmental sustainability) to identify achievements and articulate preliminary lessons about how to build stronger and more meaningful relationships. We identify the need to: strive towards equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships; work with boundary spanners from both the academy and civil society to facilitate such relationships; be transparent and self-reflexive about power differentials; and look continuously for ways to mitigate inequities.

Keywords

community-campus engagement; community first; food sovereignty; impact; poverty reduction; sustainability

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Introduction

Community-campus engagement (CCE) is a powerful tool for action research among university and college campuses across North America. Community-based organizations have increasingly recognized the value of participating in partnerships with faculty, students, and research staff to increase capacity, broaden their reach, and advance their overall goals. The growing literature on community-based research (Flicker et al., 2008; Strand et al., 2003), community-engaged learning (Butin, 2010; Felten and Clayton, 2011), and participatory action research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019; Kemmis et al., 2014) describes the benefits of these and other CCE approaches in detail (Buys and Bursnall, 2007; Hart et al., 2008; Hall, 2009). However, despite its growing popularity, many researchers and community-based practitioners have expressed a range of concerns with these kinds of partnerships. For example, CCE tends to favor the interests of post-secondary institutions over community organizations, and rarely leads to sustained relationships with community-based organizations (Stoecker, 2009; Bortolin, 2011). Partnerships that fail to address these challenges limit the overall impact of collaborative efforts, and risk reproducing unequal power relations. These concerns have led to calls for 'community first' approaches that recognize and address the need for collaboration with mutual benefit and a focus on the impacts for community-based partners (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2000; Dempsey, 2010; Cronley, 2015).

In response to criticisms, scholars and community-based practitioners suggest that community organizations play a more central role in defining processes of CCE (Sullivan et al., 2001; Bortolin, 2011; Cronley et al., 2015; Stoecker, 2009). Many propose ways to reform academic institutions to better serve this purpose (Roche et al., 2010; Jackson, 2008; Watson, 2008; Stoecker, 2008, Strand et al., 2003), and campus-community partnership processes (Sweatman and Warner, 2020). The challenge can be summed up as follows: Rather than assuming post-secondary institutions should do more *for* the community, higher education should focus on doing more *with* the community (Ward and Wolf-Wendal, 2000; Goemans et al., 2018). Debates in the literature, coupled with our own experiences working within CCE, provided a foundation for the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) research project. Established in 2012 as a partnership among academics and community groups across Canada, CFICE was a collaborative research project that aimed to better understand how community-campus

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partnerships could be designed and implemented to maximize the value for community-based organizations. Recognizing that the strategic plans of an increasing number of Canadian universities and colleges emphasize community engagement, CFICE sought to encourage future engagement to be undertaken *with*, rather than *for* communities (Peacock et al., 2020).

For CFICE, being 'community-first' meant engaging in *equitable* partnerships to *co-create* knowledge and action plans to address pressing social, economic, and environmental issues. Our efforts were based on the belief that collaborative and mutually beneficial partnerships are an important part of building more equitable and sustainable futures. Between 2012 and 2017, the project team worked through independently operated but interconnected hubs, each with a community and an academic co-lead. These hubs focused on pressing social, economic, and environmental issues, including violence against women, food sovereignty (FS), poverty reduction (PR), and community environmental sustainability (CES). Through community-driven projects in these sectors, CFICE collaborators tested community-first approaches to study *how* community and campus partners work together to create meaningful sector-specific change. A fifth CFICE hub focused on knowledge mobilization. It also supported several projects, including one designed to examine the impacts of students involved in knowledge mobilization. In the latter phase (2016-2020), CFICE created cross-sectional working groups to provide tools and research to support community-campus partnerships.[1]

While many scholars have addressed the successes and challenges of CCE, few have documented how community first approaches work, and how they might have strong community impact.[2] In this essay, as academic co-leads that worked on the CFICE project, we reflect on our experiences, drawing on research and practice from three of CFICE's thematic hubs[3] (FS, PR, and CES) to document key impacts across a broad range of CCE efforts. We begin by identifying some of the main achievements in each of the hubs and then synthesize learnings about how to build CCE partnerships that maximize community impact.

Food Sovereignty Hub

The FS Hub aimed to support the work of food movements across Canada (Levkoe 2014; Desmarais et al. 2011) and to advance the goals of food sovereignty: "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations" (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). The FS Hub was co-led by Food Secure Canada/Réseau pour une alimentation durable (FSC/RAD), a pan-Canadian food movement organization. Through the FS Hub, we sought to build on pre-existing collaborations and to expand and refine the work of an emergent community of food practice (Levkoe, 2017). The Hub also worked to build stronger links between research and policy advocacy and to see the research capacity of community-based organizations (particularly those working at the grassroots level) better recognized and supported through links to academic scholarship. Working with academic and community partners through twelve demonstration projects across Canada, we explored various partnership approaches to translate learnings into the existing and future CCE projects. Ultimately, the Hub aimed to promote the adoption of food-related policies and practices that would better meet the needs of those most marginalized by the dominant industrial food system and to support the multiplicity of food movement actors working for social, economic, and environmental justice.

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[1] For more information and the CFICE project see https://carleton.ca/communityfirst/.

[2] For examples of studies that do address 'community first approaches, see the Special Section on Community Impacts of Engaged Research, Teaching and Practice in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* Volume 26, No. 1, Winter 2020 (curated by three of the co-authors of this article as guest editors).

[3] For more information and three Hubs and details of the specific projects see https://carleton.ca/communityfirst/sector-specific-work/sector-specific-projects/#CFSProjects

One of the most significant achievements of the FS Hub was the development of a collaborative governance structure that might serve as a model for future CCE work. Led by a core management team, the Hub's governance was composed of a community and academic co-lead, a graduate research assistant, and a community liaison representing FSC/RAD. Each member took on particular responsibilities and the team met regularly by teleconference (and in person when possible) to check-in on the Hub's activities and to reach consensus on changes in direction, focus, or methodology. The resilience of this collaborative governance model was illustrated by the ability of the Hub to function throughout the transition of both the academic and community co-leads over the course of the project. Further, as the projects progressed, the Hub's research assistant shifted focus from administrative tasks to decision-making responsibilities. The management team also relied heavily on the relationships established with our twelve demonstration projects to inform decisions and to ensure they continued to address the Hub's goals in the analysis, writing, and setting of future directions. As within the management team, the horizontal leadership structure was echoed throughout the demonstration projects, which involved a deep level of trust and mutual respect between community-based practitioners and academics.

Each of the twelve demonstration projects had specific impacts on their respective communities, regions, and/or sectors. These projects also made important policy contributions to food movement work. For example, one of the projects involved the expansion of the Planning for Change: Community Development in Practice graduate service learning course at the University of Toronto (Levkoe et al., 2014). Through partnerships among the course instructors and food movement organizations (e.g., Meal Exchange and Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming), the project helped to increase the research capacity and impact of the community partners. The students' and professors contributed to the organizations' efforts to advance their objectives and goals and the capacity to conduct research and produce scholarly and public facing knowledge mobilization products (Levkoe et al., 2019b). Another project with the BC Food Systems Network examined the experiences of participants engaged in community-based research between Indigenous and settler communities. This project identified important challenges and opportunities and developed the foundation for future collaboration. As part of this project, the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty developed a protocol for such research relationships addressing the sensitive issue of 'ownership' of traditional knowledge. This work, in turn, led to the development of a new demonstration project supported by the FS Hub research assistant. These successes can be attributed to the space carved out by the FS Hub for each of the demonstration projects to do their work in a particular regional context. This included providing some financial resources to support each of the projects while offering ongoing support to connect the different place-based projects to broader food movements through our core partners.

The FS Hub also impacted the work of our core partner organizations. Specifically, the Hub played an active role in strengthening the existing community of practice by creating a stronger culture of engagement between academics and community-based practitioners in Canada's growing food movements. This culture change was fostered by ensuring that key community and academic partners from the twelve demonstration projects were actively involved in FS Hub decision-making and knowledge mobilization work, including webinars and national-level conference presentations (which were widely attended by academics and community members external to the CFICE project, providing opportunities for broader input and conversation in relation to food movements' goals). For example, several Hub project participants were supported to attend the FSC/RAD annual assemblies to engage in discussions about key food systems issues and campaigns on school food programs, municipal policy, and public sector procurement. CFICE also supported community-based practitioners to participate in annual assemblies of the Canadian Association for Food Studies/l'Association canadienne des études sur l' alimentation (CAFS/ACÉA), a pan-Canadian network of food systems scholars. This community involvement was often an eye opener for the academics, allowing them to better understand the depth and breadth of community knowledge and experience (and to reflect on what that might mean for their own work). In general, the FS Hub enabled CAFS/ACÉA to involve community-based researchers and practitioners more actively in their annual assemblies. The FS Hub management team also took a leadership role in organizing regular meetings between staff, executives, and members of FSC/RAD and CAFS/ACÉA. These meetings have become important spaces to strategize about joint initiatives and shared projects. The mutual desires of both organizations to expand their memberships, build food movements, and advance the field of food studies has accelerated the success of these initiatives.

Beyond conferences and meetings, Hub co-leads, research assistants and partners also worked collectively to analyze and document successful CCE principles and practices with food movements. These learnings have been reflected upon, debated, and shared through academic papers, book chapters, webinars, and conference presentations (for example, see Andrée et al., 2014; Andrée et al., 2016; Levkoe et al., 2016; Kepkiewicz et al., 2017; Kepkiewicz et al., 2018; Levkoe et al., 2019a' 2019b; Levkoe and Kepkiewicz,_2020). Together, all these activities have promoted a genuine recognition that knowledge generated in community and academic circles has a different but equal value. Furthermore, it has become clear that much of the co-generated knowledge occupies an important "in-between space" that brings new insights to both theoretical and practical questions. At the same time, this knowledge has collectively contributed to an increased awareness within food movements across Canada of the potential benefits of CCE and the mechanisms for collaboration based on a model of respectful relationships between academic institutions and communities, both at local and national levels.

Poverty Reduction Hub

The PR Hub created a partnership between academics at Carleton University and Vibrant Communities Canada (VC). VC is a well-established pan-Canadian initiative through which 55 communities have experimented with new and innovative approaches to poverty reduction work. These approaches emphasize collaboration across sectors (including post-secondary institutions), comprehensive thinking and action, building on community assets, and a long-term process of learning and change. This section outlines five steps that describe our process for testing community-first approaches to study *how* community and campus partners work together to create meaningful change in reducing poverty.

Step One: Build Trust from the start. Although the initiators of the CFICE project arranged the relationship between the Hub co-leads, it turned out to be a successful partnership. One benefit of being unfamiliar with each other (and each other's work) was that we had few preconceived notions and had to take the time to get to know one another. One of the ways we did this was by meeting in-person to co-create a common agenda and develop a common language. The work of getting to know each other was essential to building an equitable Hub structure. The need for time to establish trust is often discussed in the literature on community-based research (Hyde and Meyer, 2004), but is difficult to create given pressured academic terms and pressure to do the work that reduces poverty. While many techniques for building trust in CBR have been discussed in the literature, like use of social media (Glazier and Topping, 2021) and shared experiences and ability to understand the community communication styles (Cidro et al., 2017), it was important that the academic co-lead spend time with staff at the VC at the headquarters – an imperative step in equalizing power and creating space for collaboration. The early lessons were that these partnerships take time to nurture and develop for the partners to grow their collective capacities to work together effectively and enable the development of a common vision of the Hub's goals. These goals included leveraging community and campus resources to drive forward policy change related to poverty reduction and examining specific models of CCE to determine how they facilitate policy change.

Step two: Community first, in this circumstance, meant putting poverty reduction work first and building the research around this work. As an already-established backbone organization, VC had established perspectives about successful poverty reduction work. Since VC's methodology incorporates collective impact (i.e., bringing together relevant community stakeholders around a specific issue), campuses were already at their community roundtables (Schwartz et al., 2016). Together, we decided that the PR Hub would provide funding for demonstration projects that operated through CCE partnerships and contributed to reducing poverty. The role of the co-leads and a research assistant would be to analyze these partnerships and co-created models of CCE (also see, Weaver, 2019)

We established a governance model where the community and academic co-leads had equal decision-making power, with all decisions made collaboratively, a process that Strand et al. (2003) call democratization of knowledge. Calls for demonstration projects were sent to VC poverty roundtables with whom the hub co-leads selected which projects to be funded. Each demonstration project also had community and academic co-leads. Any knowledge created about poverty reduction or models of CCE was shared at VC-wide gatherings that were always held in different community settings in cities across Canada. All presentations of the co-created knowledge were created for a community audience, another form of democratization of knowledge. The Hub co-leads also participated in academic presentations at conferences with project-level co-leads when possible and worked together to prepare journal articles and book chapters. Over the years the PR hub had four student research assistants who were intricately involved in the work of the hub (Kozak et al., 2019).

Steps three: Co-create tools to aid poverty reduction work and the research. One of the outcomes of making collaborative decisions was the co-creation of measurement instruments and knowledge. The first such product was the Hub-level Theory of Change (Reinholz and Andrews, 2020).[4] Creating this document proved to be a straightforward process because VC neighbourhood roundtables were familiar with the Theory of Change approach, which involved numerous face-to-face meetings where all aspects of the partnership and the outcomes of the work were discussed. The Theory of Change consisted of six areas: the problem or issue, community and university needs/assets, desired outcomes, influential factors, strategies, and assumptions. As the Theory of Change evolved, there was a deeper understanding among community members of university needs and academics better understood the assets and limitations of community members. With these learnings came the realization that Hub community and academic partners were all doing CCE work “off the side of their desks.” In addition, we realized that barriers exist for both community and academic partners in trying to leverage resources for policy changes related to poverty reduction; the need for sustained financial resources, and for institutional support.

Step four: Work to equalize power. During one of the face-to-face meetings, principles were identified to equalize power between the various partners involved. These principles fell into three main categories. First, we recognized that effective communication entails a commitment to open and honest communication by all parties. This includes listening more than talking and learning one another’s jargon. Second, successful relationship building involves a commitment to willingly give the gift of one’s time and be transparent about goals, available resource capacity, specific timelines, and deadlines, as well as the reasons for engaging in the partnership. It also entails being aware of others' needs and interests, including seeing the world through their lens of reality, listening to their stories, learning about their work, personalities, and the politics at play. Being engaged in the work of one's partners, including attending their meetings, conferences, and gatherings, and considering the possibility of long-term relationships also contributes to positive relationship building. Third, the idea of putting the "community first" was focused on the question of who sets the agenda for the work to be done. A decision was made very early in the collaboration that VC would take the lead setting the Hub's action research agenda in consultation with the university partner.

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[4] A Theory of Change is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (for details, see www.theoryofchange.org/).

Step five: Work to reduce poverty. The Hub applied these principles of power equalization towards demonstration projects that sought to "move the needle" on poverty. For example, a partnership between the Hamilton Roundtable for the PR Hub and McMaster University worked to assess the barriers experienced by small- to medium-sized businesses to implementing a living wage. This information was used to help businesses find ways to overcome these barriers. As of December 2014, 110 employers had signed on to be Living Wage employers (Zeng and Hoing, 2017). Another demonstration project, the VC Saint John New Brunswick/University of New Brunswick partnership, evaluated CCE efforts involving university students mentoring youth in designated neighbourhoods. Through this project, the partners facilitated a city-wide collective impact initiative in Saint John to address and improve youth educational attainment (Bigney et al., 2019; Pei et al., 2015). Based on the experiences of our partners, the Hub created a document that provided an overview of various models of CCE.

The work of developing these models has had a major impact. For example, the Pathway to Potential and University of Windsor demonstration project has used the Hub's documents as a springboard to engage in consultations with key stakeholders, to complete a comprehensive scan of local resources, and to complete research on the best models of CCE for them. These activities resulted in an inventory of existing and potential human and financial resources, as well as recommendations for how these resources could be best leveraged and coordinated to support sustainable, multidisciplinary CCE. A report outlining the process of developing the inventory and final recommendation was produced, leading to a daylong workshop to aid the partners in creating the policy changes necessary to enable their CCE (Lefrancois, 2019).

Community Environmental Sustainability Hub

The CES Hub worked to connect actors from its two regional nodes in Ontario (one in Ottawa and another in Peterborough and Haliburton) through annual meetings, to facilitate comparative case studies. In the first year, the two nodes began by functioning somewhat independently, generating very successful demonstration projects in each location. While a national-level partner or a governance structure (similar to the FS and PR Hubs) might have facilitated scaling impacts up and out, focusing efforts locally enabled the CES Hub to provide discrete but important contributions to a variety of organizations and to understand specific aspects of how community organizations benefit from CCE. Below, we review some of the achievements of both CES Hub nodes.

CES Ottawa

The CES Ottawa Hub established two successful demonstration projects and contributed substantially to a third pilot project. The CES Hub embedded research assistants in community-based projects to provide support and to facilitate evaluations, including the CCE relationships. This approach to CCE meant the student research assistants enjoyed ongoing access to community participants, and ensured continuity of support and engagement, and thus the development of meaningful working and professional relationships. By working in place, researchers significantly advanced the mandates of the community partners.

The Hub benefited from a strong partnership with Sustainable Living Ottawa East (SLOE) through investigating potential environmental and social sustainability strategies for the re-development of the Oblate Lands (an inner urban greenspace property formerly owned by an Order of Catholic Missionaries) in Old Ottawa East. Two research assistants supported SLOE in implementing several community engagement activities between residents and individuals with expertise in sustainable urban development. A research assistant also assisted SLOE in obtaining funding to support the development and financing of community workshops to build interest among residents in living and/or investing in innovative co-housing for older adults that incorporates options for affordability and access to seniors' services. This work advanced environmental sustainability by supporting community initiatives to advocate for accessible rental housing, low-impact development to moderate storm water flow, and promoting energy efficiency measures, including connection to a district energy grid (Martin et al., 2017).

The CES Ottawa Hub also sponsored the Ottawa Eco-Talent Network (OETN) as a demonstration project. The OETN is a non-profit organization in Ottawa aimed at connecting community-based environmental groups with faculty and students in post-secondary institutions and building a network of experienced *pro bono* advisors with relevant expertise. A research assistant helped to write the application that secured enough funding to hire a new Executive Director and make OETN operational within three-years. As of 2021, the organization had expanded its staff, including an Executive Director and two Program Coordinators.

Our third project provided applied research support to the GottaGo! Campaign, which emerged from a request to support a grassroots movement for better access to public toilets in Ottawa. The project was driven by a community-first ethos and the campaign was situated in discussions on the right to the city, and the necessity for spatial justice for vulnerable subgroups to improve their access to the city (and thus their ability to participate fully in civic life). These elements represent critical components of sustainable community. In the first year of the project, one research assistant gathered primary evidence through interviews with vulnerable populations to compile a final report. In the second year, a research assistant compiled a detailed database of public toilets in Ottawa to create a map of existing toilets. GottaGo! used both outputs to lobby municipal government to vote unanimously to include two additional public toilets along the new Light Rail Transit line, and to sponsor an app to identify public toilets in Ottawa. This project generated concrete and tangible policy outcomes, as well as valuable pedagogical experiences for the students involved. The success of this demonstration project was contingent on a few critical factors: matching "seed funding" from an internal source; strong, self-directed student researchers with broad skill sets; and supportive community mentors that understand both the academic and activist contexts.

CES Peterborough-Haliburton (Ptbo-Halib)

The CES Peterborough-Haliburton (Ptbo-Halib) Hub was co-led by the Trent Community Research Centre (TCRC), which proved essential for facilitating and brokering connections between faculty and community partners and selecting projects in Peterborough. U-Links Centre for Community Based Research served a similar brokering role in Haliburton. Hub projects were organized geographically, divided between Peterborough and Haliburton based on specific interests in each of these areas – all were selected and led by the community. Seven demonstration projects were undertaken, and core organizations emerged both in Peterborough (Green-UP) and Haliburton (Abbey Gardens and Haliburton Highlands Land Trust [HHLT]). Additionally, three environmental sustainability courses at Trent University carried out community-based research for Abbey Gardens and HHLT with the support of U-Links. As in the CES Ottawa Hub, graduate student research assistants were embedded in the demonstration projects, with similarly positive results for the research assistants and community partners. Overall, significant impacts included: providing community partners a stable foundation for building graduate-level research, participatory action research, and evaluative capacity (where there was previously a dearth of capacity); and creating and expanding partner networks for future projects that can leverage funding. Knowledge dissemination occurred by bringing together community partners, faculty, and graduate students through several presentations at community, professional, and academic conferences, and workshops.

As an example of the node's work in Peterborough, the Active Neighbourhoods Canada – Stewart Street project in the downtown low-income Stewart Street neighbourhood successfully co-created pride and agency with and among neighbourhood residents. It also augmented the capacity of neighbourhood residents, city planning staff from Transportation, Planning and Development, and faculty to advocate for input and influence in city planning processes affecting the neighbourhood's street design. This work led to expanded networks, improved capacity for future collaborations, the leveraging of financial and professional resources from Trent University and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the education of planners through the productive power reversal of community-neighbourhood-led (instead of planner-led) workshops on the neighbourhood that were offered by the Ontario Professional Planners' Institute, and invitations to attend public consultations over municipal street (re)design impacting the neighbourhood.

Funding for similar interventions was secured to build on this knowledge and influence and apply it in three additional downtown neighbourhoods.

In Haliburton, having graduate students embedded in projects over the four years scaled up partners' research and evaluative capacity. For HHLT, new bio-monitoring tools supported the establishment of valuable baseline information that raised the profile of the HHLT to private landowners, built awareness of the importance of maintaining and creating healthy ecosystems and capacity for future collaborations, and increased the crucial volunteer base. For Abbey Gardens, the preparation of a needs assessment served as a training tool and increased strategic reflection. This model of graduate student partnership with community organizations served as the model for the endowed Trent graduate research assistantship with Abbey Gardens in Haliburton.

Discussion

Our collective work across multiple sectors, engaging in dozens of projects and working with hundreds of community-based collaborators has given us insight into ways that CCE can be designed and implemented to maximize the value created for community-based organizations. The research and reflections from the three Hubs have illustrated key successes from our CCE work. The FS Hub illustrated the value of building authentic relationships through a collaborative governance structure and outlined the range of context-specific impacts it had in various places across Canada as a result. The FS Hub's focus on authentic relationship building also led to an improved culture of CCE within FSC/RAD. The PR Hub demonstrated the importance of creating a common language, developing equitable decision-making processes by equalizing knowledge and power, and co-creating measurement instruments for having an impact in poverty reduction. These processes led to positive place-based impacts across Canada. The CES Hub demonstrated the value of embedding research assistants in community projects, the importance of CCE brokers (such as the OETN, TCRC and U-Links) for connecting community and campus players, and reaffirmed the value of applied research, evaluative, and knowledge dissemination capacity for community partners. Building on these successes, the remainder of this section highlights key lessons we have learned about how to build relationships that lead to positive community impacts.

Key lessons to maximize value for community-based organizations:

- Build authentic relationships through collaborative governance
- Create a common language
- Share power in decision making
- Co-create evaluation tools
- Embed research assistants in community projects
- Employ CCE brokers to connect community and campus
- Share findings with community

First, one of the best ways to maximize the value for community-based organizations is through building equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships. These are worth striving for, despite the challenges. The FS, PR, and CES Hub stories illustrate horizontal working relationships at the level of Hub co-leads. Drawing on research in Latin America and Spanish contexts, Zusman (2004) argues that academics working with social movements should adopt a horizontal approach to their work – where knowledge and accountability is shared among colleagues. Rather than conceive of community-based research as academic-led empirical investigation, the relationship should evolve out of a commitment to question political, social, and economic conditions, and recognition that the production of knowledge, and alternative political practice is a collaborative and mutually beneficial process. The successes of the three CFICE Hubs show that such relationships are not only possible but also immensely productive.

Equitable and mutually beneficial CCE partnerships requires adequate resources – for faculty, students, and community partners. Faculty engaged in these activities often do so 'off the side of their desks' – at the expense of work-life balance, and in some cases, delay or vulnerability in tenure and promotion advancement. Institutional change is required to foster value for, and a culture of, CCE, including creating research stipends, building teaching opportunities that align with community engagement, and better recognition by Tenure and Promotion committees of the legitimacy, value, and contribution of CCE to academic research (Changfoot et al. 2020). Additionally, students depend on stipends to ensure commitment and professionalism. Strong senior undergraduate and graduate students should be privileged for this work – if we are truly dedicated to putting community first, we will employ our brightest and most talented researchers, and develop others in-house to make them community ready. Community partners also require financial support, either as salary replacement, or as unallocated core funding. All Hub community partners dedicated significant in-kind volunteer contributions of time, expertise, and mentorship, and would appreciate a return on their investment in terms of beneficial project outcomes and/or formal financial recognition of their contributions to student training, faculty research, and the enhanced public profile of the post-secondary institution involved.

Notably, building horizontal partnerships does not mean that all partners take on all pieces of work equally. Horizontality can include a division of labour according to capacity. All partners do not have to be involved in all levels of decision-making and do not need to be consulted at every step of the project. Some partners may have expertise in specific areas and others may be limited in their time and ability to take on certain tasks. For example, in the case of the FS and CES Ottawa and Ptbo-Halib Hubs, many tasks were completed by the academics involved (e.g., ethics protocols, financial administration, promotion of projects through CFICE), which left the community partners more time and energy to focus on the specific project work. An important part in the success of this labour division was regular and transparent communication that enabled everyone to participate according to their need and ability.

Second, equitable partnerships require individuals who have a broad skill set for bridging the relationships between community and academic partners. These individuals can be described as "boundary spanners," and can come from one or both sides of the partnership if they understand one another's contexts (including processes and communication styles) well enough to effectively facilitate CCE between the community and campus (Paton et al., 2014). An academic boundary spanner understands the demands and constraints within which community-based organizations work. They communicate scholarly outputs in policy-oriented, accessible and lay formats, and they hold skills more akin to a community developer (e.g., the patience to engage in process, to facilitate meetings and consultations among diverse stakeholders, to serve multiple roles and functions simultaneously, and to develop relationships of trust and reciprocity) (see Weerts and Sandmann [2010] for a fuller description of community engagement and boundary spanning at research-intensive institutions). **A community-based boundary spanner understands the rigours of ethical scholarly inquiry, the demands and timelines faced by researchers, the need for both lay and scholarly outputs, and, ultimately, what constitutes a realistic request of an engaged scholar.** Supporting the development of new boundary spanners must be a key task of CCE work.

In the case of the three Hubs, several of the academic boundary-spanners involved in demonstration projects or in Hub management can also be defined as "scholar-activists". Dawson and Sinwell (2012) capitalize "SCHOLAR-ACTIVISTS" to indicate the depth of commitment to each of the two spheres. This positionality brings with it a heightened level of engagement with social, economic, and environmental justice. This stance entails "a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements" (186). Further, it "requires scholars to be embedded and active within movements and to challenge the 'institutional logic of academia itself'" (Juris, 2007). FS Hub partners also note that this role requires a high degree of reflexivity to ensure that expectations of both the academy and community continue to be met and that tensions between the two are identified and mitigated (Levkoe et al., 2016).

Third, to achieve equitable partnerships, our Hub descriptions reveal the importance of being transparent about, and addressing where possible, power differentials among partners. Being transparent about power differentials means, for example, recognizing the way that those in the community sector are made vulnerable. While many academics enjoy job security and intellectual autonomy, community-based practitioners often face precarious employment and must be strategic about their public personas. However, representatives of community organizations also possess certain forms of power. They often act as gatekeepers to academics undertaking research. They may also have strong social capital, including access to networks of contacts within the community, the ear of policymakers, and depth and breadth of perspective from years of experience in a given social movement. These strengths coupled with the assets that academics bring to the table can be employed to enact social change. Ochocka and Janzen (2014) argue, "creating and maintaining this intellectual and safe 'research space' where people can gather, conduct high quality research, learn from each other and advocate for social change is an important facilitating factor for successful [community-based research]" (30). Notably, there are also significant power differentials at work in the university between professors, students, and staff that impact the kinds of relationships that can be built through CCE projects.

Addressing power also means taking organizational mandates into account in partnership work. Organizational and institutional mandates—including how individuals are rewarded for work—continue to shape what one *can* and *cannot* do around reciprocity, even with the best of partnership intentions. These structures can create roadblocks to partnerships that are not easily surmounted. An example was the split in the CES Hub, where both the Ottawa and Ptbo-Halib co-leads had community partners primarily interested in addressing issues within their local communities, also respecting the differences of each community in terms of priorities and projects that were divergent. This division resulted in a change from the initial goal to develop Hub-wide projects but holds important lessons that such an envisioned Hub-wide coherence at the outset was best deferred to local specificities in this instance. Another example involves funding. CFICE funding was held by, and flowed from, the university, thus maintaining a hierarchical power dynamic (both real and perceived) even when Hubs achieved consensus about distribution of Hub resources.

Our research across these three Hubs identified additional assumptions that need to be addressed for power imbalances to be challenged. Whether these are epistemological assumptions about whose knowledge counts, or procedural assumptions made about how to achieve specific goals, CCE researchers must be prepared to address these iteratively at the outset of and during CCE to ensure that equity and reciprocity are centered in the partnerships. Similarly, nuanced CCE requires disaggregating concepts like 'community' and 'academy'. Each of these terms represents a wide variety and heterogeneous mix of individuals and organizations. Small, medium, and large community-based organizations have different capacities, mandates, and orientations towards working with post-secondary institutional partners. As well, different academic institutions and disciplines have distinct levels of commitment to (or ambivalence towards) CCE. Some of the individuals working in this space legitimately wear two 'hats' – representing both the community and academy. Finally, some of the most successful CCE projects are collective endeavours, driven by a common vision with many key actors working together. In these contexts, a simple dichotomy of 'community' and 'campus' is by far an oversimplification. It is probably best abandoned for a reflexive consideration of the intersectional space created when community and campus come together in partnerships that transparently address partners' needs as they arise alongside the importance of key project goals.

An informal way that we see partners address power imbalances in CCE informally through reciprocity – a practice that can take many forms. In our projects, research assistants and academics sometimes provided community partners with practical outputs, like setting up a virtual shared platform for sharing documents, thus augmenting organizational capacity in a way that lasts beyond the project. Such gift-giving practices do not necessarily advance academic research, but they do improve informational infrastructure and build stronger relationships by demonstrating reciprocity. An even more potent way to mitigate power imbalances would be to address imbalances in funding. For example, institutions and funders rarely provide structural funding for community organizations participating in CCE and funding available to community partner organizations always falls short of their significant investments of time and expertise. **Without funding to augment their already time- and money-constrained capacity, community organizations cannot participate with equal power in the partnership.** In the interim, partnerships must emphasize transparent decision-making processes around funding and budgeting to help equalize the power between academic and community partners. The FS, PR and CES Hubs are good examples of how shared and transparent decision-making around funding and around an equitable division of responsibility based on capacity can strengthen a CCE partnership and balance the power differentials caused by a lack of structural funding for community partners. Still, structures and processes that address power differentials (and changing power differentials as partnerships unfold) must remain at the fore in CCE.

Conclusion

This reflective essay has described the sector-specific work undertaken by three of the CFICE Hubs. The lessons from our demonstration projects illustrate tangible ways to build strong relationships that maximize impact. These include striving towards equitable and mutually beneficial (i.e., horizontal) partnerships, finding (and/or training) boundary spanners from both the academy and civil society to facilitate such relationships (and consciously building these skill sets moving forward), being transparent and self-reflexive about power differentials, and continuously looking for ways to mitigate inequities (from small gifts of reciprocity to more substantial shifts in resource allocation). We believe the community impacts of our work are substantial, though in many cases emergent, and sometimes difficult to measure and account for (Peacock et al. 2020). However, five years of demonstration projects have resulted in visible success, from the emergence of the Ottawa Eco-Talent Network to a list of one hundred and ten (and counting) Living Wage employers in Hamilton and an endowed Research Assistant at Trent to support embedded research with community organization. The promise for future success remains, including increased access to affordable housing and seniors' co-housing in Old Ottawa East. Like CCE itself, the lessons from CFICE remain far from stagnant and we will continue to observe the impacts of our work and learn from our experiences over the long-term.

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