Editors’ Comments

This eBook explores lessons for community-university research partnerships by reflecting on the experiences, achievements and challenges of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP). Between 2006 and 2012, the six regional nodes and the national hub of CSERP were funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to conduct research on the social economy in Canada. This provided an unprecedented level of resources and pan-Canadian experimentation within a collaborative model of engagement, knowledge creation, sectoral (self) definition and policy development through research.

Several characteristics of the social economy render it a challenging field in which to build community-university partnerships. The social economy is highly diverse; while some parts of the social economy are professionalized and have formalized organizational structures that interact well with the university sector; important parts are emergent, informal and highly localized. At the same time, each of the CSERPs had to grapple with longstanding questions about building and sustaining community-university partnerships. The great diversity in the regional contexts, and hence the variation in the approaches taken to partnership-building and engagement by the CSERPs, provides an opportunity to draw out insights on the process and challenges of forging (and maintaining) practitioner-university engagement.

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