CHAPTER 10

The Academic/Practitioner Divide – Fact or Fiction? Reflection on the Role of the Lead Staff Personnel

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This paper draws from the experience, insight and thinking of the coordinators of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP), a Community-University Research Partnerships program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). CSERP included a national “hub” and six regional research networks or nodes covering

Some Key Characteristics of the Six Nodes and the Hub

The six regional nodes were:
Atlantic; Québec; Southern Ontario; Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northern Ontario; British Columbia and Alberta (BALTA); & Northern Canada.

Number of time zones working across: ranged from five for the Hub and Northern Node to one for Quebec and Southern Ontario.

Number of provinces and territories worked in: Half a province for the Southern Ontario Node (mostly the Greater Toronto area), one for Québec, two for BALTA, four for the Atlantic Node, three for the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario Node, and three territories and two provinces for the Northern Node.

Number of languages: One for the Québec Node, two for the Hub, Atlantic and Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario Nodes and between three to five for the Northern Node depending on the territory (Yukon – 8 aboriginal languages, NWT – 9 aboriginal languages, Nunavut & Nunavik – Inuktitut). Some BALTA outputs have been translated into French, German, Japanese and Swedish. The Hub assisted with the translation of material – mostly from French to English.

Starting date: Four nodes and the hub began in September 2005 and two of the nodes began in March/April 2006.

Experience of Social Economy research: One node had no staff with prior experience in working or researching the Social Economy, four nodes had Principal Investigators who had worked together in the past and belonged to the same academic society (Canadian Association for the Study of Cooperation), and one node was headed by a community organization with few ties to the academic researchers.
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the various regions of Canada. CSERP partnerships were funded over the period of 2005-2012, with the start and completion dates of each node and the national “hub” varying somewhat, with none extending longer than six years.

This paper offers insights from our experience and perspective on the challenges of creating effective research partnerships bridging the academic and practitioner communities, approaches to addressing these challenges and implications for creating effective future partnerships. We also offer some thoughts on the specific role of lead staff persons within complex community-university research partnerships.

The CSERP partnerships were modeled in part on other Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) partnerships funded by SSHRC and required a partnership agreement between an academic institution and one or more practitioner-led, community-based organizations. Six of the CSERP partnerships were led by a university partner (or lead) while one, BALTA, was led by a community organization (see Table 10.1: for descriptions of each node and the national hub; see also Appendices A1 to A7).

Each of the regional bodies, called nodes, and the national hub were unique in terms of their structure, approach and operations. Further, each employed a different approach to the role of the main staff in assisting the principal investigator (PI) in managing the work of the research partnership. The coordinators’ diverse backgrounds, roles, and the setting of each node and the hub resulted in seven very different contexts, creating an ideal opportunity to explore the effectiveness, usefulness and appropriateness of ways to organize community-university partnerships (see Table 10.1).

The coordinators had the opportunity to meet in person and through teleconferences and discussed writing a reflection of their experiences. A number of themes were agreed to and each coordinator was asked to contribute to this. As part of the reflective process, we discussed the paper with many of the principal investigators and directors of the nodes and the hub. The Hub Manager and the BALTA Coordinator took the lead in pulling the paper together and in providing the opportunity for each coordinator to feel that the paper reflected their input.

One of the coordinators observed, “Organizations working within the social economy often need support to help them bridge the ‘policy’ gap in their work.” (These groups are often those who best know and understand the needs of the various communities they represent, and so their “advocacy” or other work in the community is often driven by great knowledge. The benefit of a community-university research partnership to this process is that community partner’s experiences can be operationalized into research problems with support from academic researchers, allowing them to produce evidence-based policy recommendations. At times, this process can be halted due to a lack of direct and
appropriate means of input to government processes of policy development (i.e., the “Recommendations” papers gathering dust on shelves). The value of inviting government representatives to sit around a table with community and academic partners cannot be underestimated. Often, none of these participants possess the means to make this happen outside of a research partnership environment. The beauty of this model is that community and academic participants are brought together with government partners at meetings, at book launches, or at research conferences, allowing formal and informal conversations to happen. Without this potential outlet for their knowledge of their communities, the work of social economy organizations in their communities can too often go unnoticed in the government processes of policy development. Without this potential input to their work, government partners run the risk of operating without direct knowledge of the lived experiences within the communities of their jurisdiction.

Salipante and Aran (2003) describe the concept of practitioners as: “knowledge generators who combine intimate understanding of issues, problems and settings with established theories and methods” (p. 129). A second useful concept elaborated on by the authors was the discussion on the systems of knowledge production. They suggest two modes of knowledge production. Mode 1 is defined as “traditional discipline-oriented research, which is defined by the cognitive context of a particular disciplinary intellectual community (i.e., universities, research labs or corporate research centers)” (p. 133). It is generated primarily by individual creative efforts and is disseminated through peer-reviewed journals and professional associations. Mode 2 is “knowledge driven by an application where a specific and local problem needs a solution” (p. 134). Knowledge results from the convergence of a number of disciplines applying themselves to the problem. It is distributed through occupational and professional networks. Another author, Huff (2000), argues for model 1.5 which she defines as “residing above the other modes by combining an emphasis on practice enriched with traditional academic skills in order to produce public goods” (p. 135).

Community-university partnerships in research are interesting creations as they link together two very different institutions; in this instance, post-secondary educational institutions and non-profit organizations, with dissimilar organizational cultures, governance structures, human resource policies, mission/values and funding practices. The culture of these diverse institutions very much influences their expectations in a partnership relationship. The role of the coordinator, as the lead staff person positioned between the world of academia and that of the community sector, needs to be seen as an important translator and bridge between these different cultures. This role was crucially important as the partnerships evolved.
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In examining large research partnerships, such as CSERP, and the management, coordination, facilitation demands they create, it is vital to recognize their essential complexity. Part of this complexity arises simply from the size and the scope of research (number of co-investigators and collaborators and sub-projects, range of activity, etc.); however, it also arises in some cases, very notably with the CSERP projects, with regards to the multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary nature of the subjects of inquiry. In the case of CSERP and research on the social economy, this disciplinary complexity is further driven by the relatively new and contested conceptualization of the field. One can then add to this list of factors shaping the challenges inherent in creating true partnerships between diverse organizations and organizational cultures, challenges that exist with developing and managing all types of partnership coalitions. All of these factors contribute to the creation of a demanding management context that requires particular skills and organizational capacity to successfully navigate.

The complex management and facilitation required in creating a research partnership that truly co-constructs research and new knowledge must exist across a range of functions through the whole life cycle of the research process. In the following list, we further elaborate on these functions.

- **Co-Visioning of Project Goals, Approaches and Governance:** Partners must negotiate a common understanding of the research mandate and aims, and the broad scope of the work. This is not only a challenge between the academic and community partners, but amongst both the academic partners and the community partners. Building effective co-construction of research and knowledge without effectively addressing this co-visioning step is like building a house without a foundation.

- **Co-Development of Policy for the Partnership:** A common understanding of how power will be shared and used, how decisions will be made, how research will be managed, how students will be hired and so on, is critical.

- **Co-Planning of Research both its Broad Themes and Specific Research Projects:** Effective collaboration of both academic and community partners/co-investigators and collaborators, can bring the assets of each to creating optimum research plans. This applies both in terms of the broad research parameters and specific research projects.

- **Co-Approval of Research:** While the nodes and the hub had differing approval processes for research projects, all involved an important degree of co-approval at some level.

- **Co-Management:** Joint steering or management committees, with a balance of community and academic representation, overseeing the management of the projects provides an ongoing partnership discipline and accountability back to the partner.
• Co-Implementation of Research: Practice varied widely at this stage, with some nodes largely leaving the actual implementation of research to academics, while others had some projects led by community based researchers. If true partnership and co-construction of the research program exists at the other levels, it seems less critical who actually does the research as long as they have the requisite knowledge/skills. However some nodes found it extremely valuable, at least in some cases to have research projects co-led by an academic and a community based practitioner, bringing the particular assets of each to the research implementation process.

• Co-Analysis/and co-synthesis of research results: The strongest interpretation and use of research results is obtained where both community and academic partners bring their perspectives to the analysis and synthesis of the research. (Bussières, see Appendix B)

• Co-Dissemination of research/knowledge mobilization: Both community and academic partners bring particular niches and expertise to the dissemination and mobilization of the research. The most effective dissemination and mobilization strategies will make optimal use of both.

• Co-Evaluation: A true spirit of partnership requires the full involvement of both community and academic partners and stakeholders in evaluating the research partnership, both with regards to process and product.

Balancing the power and decision making roles of partners, both academic and community, is vital to creating partnerships that go beyond token community organization involvement. Who does what matters; the roles and responsibilities in the partnership need to be clearly defined to avoid mistrust and build a deep sense of shared ownership over the research process.

**Table 10.1: Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships: Seven Different Organizational Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node/Hub</th>
<th>Host Institution</th>
<th>Community Partners</th>
<th>Position of Main Staff Person</th>
<th>New or Existing Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>BC Institute for Co-operative Studies (a research institute located at the University of Victoria)</td>
<td>Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet)</td>
<td>Hub staff, not core University staff. Newly employed to work for the Hub, not existing university staff.</td>
<td>New partnership between BCICS and CCEDNET – both located in Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Node/Hub</td>
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<td>Community Partners</td>
<td>Position of Main Staff Person</td>
<td>New or Existing Partnership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlantic Node</strong></td>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador Community Council</td>
<td>Node staff located at MSVU</td>
<td>New partnership across Atlantic provinces, with co-directors in each provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Québec Node</strong></td>
<td>Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)</td>
<td>Chantier de l’économie sociale</td>
<td>Worked out of UQAM but was staff of the community partner</td>
<td>Prior CURAs and experience with existing partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Ontario Node</strong></td>
<td>Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto</td>
<td>Imagine Canada and the Ontario Co-operative Council</td>
<td>Co-director, post doctoral student and researcher</td>
<td>New partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan Node</strong></td>
<td>Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), the Winnipeg Inner City Research Alliance (WIRA), Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg, and the Department of Community, Economic and Social Development, Algoma University</td>
<td>Librarian and program staff existing in the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives</td>
<td>New partnership across the three provinces but built upon the strength of the Institute and previous partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BC-Alberta Node</strong></td>
<td>Canadian Centre for Community Renewal. This node was led by a community partner</td>
<td>Royal Roads University as the academic partner receiving the SSHRC funding</td>
<td>Coordinator working for the CCCR and BALTA steering committee located in a home office</td>
<td>New partnership with academic and community institutions developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The CSERP Experience

In 2009, individuals involved with the various nodes and Hub began reflecting on their experience with CSERPs with a goal of learning more about the practice of community-university partnerships generally. At the time, Hall, et al. (2009) commented on challenges faced by the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships noting that they begin to “raise more general questions about the prospects for practitioner-university engagement in research partnerships” (page 8). Among the challenges noted at the time were the different expectations and traditions about the role of research among the community and university partners, and a set of institutional factors that shape the “possibilities for partnership and engagement in research” (page 10). The potential challenges inherent in any research endeavor with such diverse partners are well documented (Flicker & Savan, 2006; Holland & Ramalay, 2008; Israel, et al., 1998; Prins, 2006; Reinke & Walker, 2006; Stoecker, 1999). However, as community-university partnerships develop in number and complexity there is a need for increased reflection on the factors that contribute to their success. For example, McNall, et al. (2008) identify a number of criteria for successful engagement, including shared leadership and resources, two-way communication, participatory decision making and agreed upon problem-solving processes, mutual respect and benefit, flexibility and innovation, and ongoing evaluation.

In co-construction of knowledge (Vaillancourt, 2009), a key aim of community university research partnerships requires a constant exchange between practitioners and researchers in all stages of conducting the research that goes from problem identification to dissemination of results. Foster-Fishman, et al. (2001) emphasize the importance of building collaborative capacity for effective coalition development. Such collaborative capacity also involves the development and facilitation of “relational capacity,” both internal and external. Our experience with CSERP suggests that, in most cases, the lead investigator and other senior co-investigators do not have the time or range of specific skills...
required to most effectively play the facilitative and management role in fostering successful partnerships. They had other key roles to play and needed to focus their attention there. A lead staff person, in the form of a coordinator, played this key role as part of the leadership team for the research partnership. This CSERP experience is supported by the literature evaluating effective partnerships. For example, both Alteroff and Knights (2009) and Creech and Willart (2001) emphasize the importance of such a manager/coordinator/facilitator role, with Alteroff and Knights also noting the value of recruiting someone with a practitioner background from outside the academic community to play this role.

The development of relationships of trust takes time. Our experience with CSERP suggests that if there was not a pre-existing relationship present at the beginning of the SSHRC award, it took several years to solidify the relationship and for trust and co-management of the research project to be truly present. The Quebec coordinator explains that:

… it is the development of interaction between researchers and practitioners throughout the research that is important. These interactions allow the building of bridges between the world of researchers and that of practitioners. Gradually differences in language and perception become clearer and the group begins to own the problem. A culture of trust develops which builds successful projects. (for original French see Appendix B).

Further, he notes that the idea of an unbridgeable gulf between the world of practice and theory may be an excuse for not engaging in the reflection required to support strong partnerships.

This observation was strongly echoed in the evaluation conducted on the early development of BALTA, the BC-Alberta node (see also Chapter 8). This node was the only one led by a community based organization and it created an almost entirely new collaborative community with its own identity, values, systems and policies rather than building on the existing set-up within an academic institution. Thus, it presented certain relatively unique challenges. The process of developing the partnership was closely followed during the first three years by a doctoral student evaluator hired by BALTA. Evidence of the gradual evolution from a culture of “we” and “they” to one of “us” clearly emerges from the evaluation data. It took time and it took a great deal of effort, including facilitation by the coordinator, the lead investigator and players with the collaborative and relational capacity referred to by Foster-Fisherman et al. (2001).

As noted above, for both practitioners and academics, participating in a CURA is only one of many competing calls on their time and resources. Within CSERP none of the principal investigators (PI) were involved full-time in that role. Often this particular partnership was only one of many research projects in
which the PI played a leadership role. In fact, it is often the case that the PI was successful in obtaining a SSHRC grant because of their distinguished research achievements and the leadership they had demonstrated. They chaired editorial boards, participated in other CURAs, chaired university departments, supervised PhD students, taught undergraduates and graduate students, managed their own research institutions (for example, BCICS and the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives), and pursued other research interests. In the case of the BC-Alberta node, the lead investigator was the executive director of a community-based organization with extensive management and program responsibilities, as well as an active role in research. It should also be noted that most of the academic researchers involved in the nodes and the hub had strong connections to practitioner organizations through their volunteer involvement, an important contribution to the partnership and one that creates additional commitments. Practitioners had their own set of challenges as they faced funding crises, policy changes at the federal and provincial level, and the complexities of running their own organization or network. As executive directors or senior managers of national or regional organizations, they needed to find time for the community-university research partnerships while devoting time to programs, human resources, budgets, governance, and advocacy within their own organizations. Despite immense effort and goodwill on the part of all parties, the coordinator was the only person whose time and intellect was engaged in this endeavor on a full-time basis.

It should also be emphasized that many of the practitioners involved had strong research backgrounds through previous employment or academic experiences, which contributed to their ability to make the relationship work. As the pressure on community organizations to adopt “evidence-based” approaches and research in their work mounts, many more practitioners are returning to the academy, further blurring the lines between academic and practitioner. The Québec coordinator for example, noted that, in his experience nobody is a pure practitioner or a pure theorist and that sometimes the gap can be greater among practitioners than between researcher and practitioners. Practitioners who come from different worlds, such as a practitioner working in a community organization and a representative of a government department, do not necessarily share the same experience or perspective. Sometimes it is more difficult to build a relationship or shared perspective among these parties than between a researcher and practitioner who may have a similar outlook (for original French, see Appendix B). In some cases, community based co-investigators took on direct roles in leading or contributing directly to research, further blurring the boundaries, and further adding to the time demands and conflicting priorities they faced.

The coordinators for CSERP exemplified these multiple roles as we were neither academic researchers (i.e., university paid faculty) nor practitioners
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(i.e., not working for a social economy organization) in the traditional sense. Negotiating this unique position meant that we had to gain the trust of both groups to be able to function in our roles and provide needed support for the development of research priorities and ensure the validation of practitioner voices within the university setting.

It should also be noted that the academic institutions hosting the nodes and the Hub were as diverse as their community partners. They ranged from comprehensive universities with large research and graduate programs to smaller regional universities with mainly undergraduate students. Yukon College had never hosted a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant prior to the Social Economy Suite grant and had to build up systems and expertise as required for this project. They also had to establish SSHRC eligibility. Another of the nodes (BALTA) was headed by a community organization with no prior experience working with SSHRC. BALTA’s lead agency, the Canadian Center for Community Renewal, also needed to undertake the SSHRC eligibility process, though eventually this route was dropped in favour of having the SSHRC grant provided through one of the academic partners.

An added complication for the Northern Node was the requirement to clearly understand the existing processes and procedures for doing research and establishing meaningful community partnerships in the northern context. Northern people want to see that community needs and interests drive research initiatives, and have institutionalized this requirement in the research licensing process (see Chapter 9). The success of the Northern Node in engaging in research projects depended on the coordinator’s thorough understanding of the research processes as well as her knowledge of the North.

The regional breadth of the nodes created its own challenges for staff. The Northern Node coordinator was working across four and half time zones, three territories and two additional northern regions in Québec and Labrador. Materials had to be translated to Inuktitut for research and related activities in Nunavut. Generally this was not required in the other Territories but had to be considered for the research in the North. The Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan Node also covered a very large area and three time zones, which provided for interesting discussions on setting times for meetings – as some participants were having their morning coffee and others were eating lunch! The node also had to maneuver different and shifting provincial political focuses and legal frameworks. This has been challenging. That said, what has emerged is less of an emphasis on the differences between the three provinces and more on the similarities they share. Only the Québec and Southern Ontario nodes worked in a single time zone.
A suitable analogy is that of a double income family with children where the partners manage complex relationships, have limited time and resources, see one another in quick passes in the kitchen or though messages left on the fridge door as they take the kids to soccer or are off to work. If the partners do not make time to nurture their own relationship, few families can survive the hectic years of raising kids while maintaining careers. Within CSERP, similar attention and time was required of the partners to develop and maintain the necessary levels of trust and engagement. Looking back on the past six years, we can see how these relationships have evolved and deepened with time. The extent to which partners within the nodes and throughout CSERP made time to invest and nurture the relationships was an important contributor to the success of the community-university relationship.

**Successes**

Given this complex environment, the coordinators for each node and the Hub played an important role in the development of a trusting relationship; they became the conduit between the interests of practitioners and that of researchers. They communicated, arranged meetings, translated SSHRC policy for the non-initiated, engaged in knowledge dissemination and mobilization activities, developed communication materials and supported both practitioners and researchers in their research. They were the constant point of contact to which questions were addressed – and interestingly all seven stayed in their position for the length of the grant. They were able to work together to maximize resources and share their knowledge with the others to ensure success of conferences, workshops, websites, knowledge mobilization products and to apply SSHRC requirements. In summary, the coordinators acted as cultural brokers between the academic institutions and SSHRC, and that of the social economy organizations.

We found this role complicated by a number of institutional factors, including university and funding policies. The coordinator’s position was described as an administrative role by university human resources managers and some academic participants in the nodes, the primary function of which was to ensure projects followed SSHRC and university directives. However, as our experiences suggest this is an entirely insufficient imaging (model/view/perception) of the coordinator’s role.

The experience of those selected as coordinators thus blurred the lines between academia, practitioner and administrator; and indeed, so did our work once hired. We facilitated and nurtured the partnerships, engaged in research, developed projects, supervised and mentored students, wrote grant applications, co-authored papers, developed museum exhibits, gave presentations, while maintaining the necessary paperwork to satisfy both university and SSHRC requirements.
Examples of the contribution of the coordinators and the Hub manager include:

- The Northern Node coordinators (Yukon, NWT and Nunavut) all collected data for the portraiture survey. This involved collecting data via telephone and in person surveys in some cases. They collected the data in each of the territories and entered it into an access database. This provided a local point of contact for social economy organizations. The coordinators were co-researchers on the project.

- The Hub Manager directly supervised student researchers and engaged in a number of research projects including a study the social economy content in Canadian senior secondary schools and researched the social economy in Kyrgyzstan.

- The Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan Node coordinator who is also a librarian helped to curate a museum exhibit that showcased the benefit of the social economy.

- Two “community liaison officers” working within the partner organizations (CUISR and WIRA) of the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario Node, have been actively engaged in research and writing and have done more of the hand-holding with students and community partners. They were one-step closer to the actual research. These two individuals were not faculty, were not community partners, were not students – they were coordinators/researchers.

- The BC and Alberta Node coordinator is the co-editor of a special edition of the Canadian Review of Social Policy, has contributed to various publications, has made conference and other presentations, and supervises students.


These were complex roles requiring a sophisticated understanding of the community-university environment and the social economy, and strong facilitation skills. SSHRC’s regulations which restrict the direct involvement in research of staff paid from the SSHRC grant do not recognize the complex and inter-related requirements of effectively facilitating and supporting effective partnership research programs. In the interests of effectiveness most of the nodes stretched the bounds of this restriction considerably, in the best interests of their partnerships and the research. The roles that the coordinators took on involved them in the development and implementation of the research program of CSERP – they were not just administrators. SSHRC’s restrictions on the role of what were presumed in general perceptions to be paid university based administrators
and support staff did not well serve the interests of complex community based research partnerships and SSHRC does itself, its partners and the ultimate beneficiaries of research no favours with these arbitrary restrictions.

Nor do such restrictions on activity make the most of the experience, education and skills that the people being recruited for these coordinator positions bring to the task. Most coordinators had extensive post-secondary education. One of the coordinator’s had completed a PhD and been involved in various research projects and programs in their region. This education background was critical to understanding the research processes and academic requirements. Another coordinator taught sociology in university settings and is enrolled in a PhD program. She also had prior experience in community-research partnerships. One of the coordinators had a Master degree and began a PhD in community-university research partnership and knowledge mobilization in the last year of the node. Although he came from the community sector, from the beginning he was involved in the research projects. One of our numbers had also spent most of his professional life as the lead staff person with a range of diverse partnership coalitions. One of the coordinators had extensive experience working for community organizations and pursued a Master’s degree tying academic studies with areas of CSERP research.

As coordinators, we have also felt that the perception of our roles as administrative and the restrictions created by SSHRC policies have contributed to a formal undervaluing and under-crediting of the contributions we have made to the research and the partnerships, though informally we have all received considerable acknowledgment from individual members of our CSERPs as to the value of our work and contributions. But unlike co-investigators and collaborators, there is no recognition within SSHRC or elsewhere of our intellectual contributions to the research. Given the recognition in the evaluation literature on partnerships of the importance of these coordinator roles and the experience of CSERP and other CURAs, it would seem to follow that a re-orientation in how SSHRC and the academic community looks at these roles is overdue.

Each of the nodes and the Hub developed unique management structures, including vis a vis the staff role. While we have suggested elsewhere in this chapter that there are fundamental principles and approaches that are integral to creating truly effective community-university partnerships, we also recognize that there is no one correct model for doing this. Each of the nodes and hub within CSERP developed approaches specific to their circumstances and each model had its strengths. With respect to the formal recognition of the importance of the coordinator’s role, the Southern Ontario Node offered an interesting and illuminating model of how to elevate and recognize this role within the overall partnership framework. Though the specific circumstances would not transfer to other situations (the coordinator’s role was a post-doctoral position) and even it
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had some shortcomings, there are some features of the Ontario approach which could potentially be applied to other contexts.

Briefly, the Southern Ontario Node had two co-directors, the lead investigator and the coordinator’s position. While each had somewhat different and complementary roles (as was equally true of the other nodes), the formal management structure incorporated and recognized the importance of the coordinator’s role. The coordinator was paid partly through the SSHRC grant as the partnership staff and partly as a post-doctoral researcher. She was able to undertake research wearing her post-doctoral hat; however, she was not permitted to do so through the SSHRC paid staff position (given SSHRC’s restrictions on grant paid staff being co-investigators). If SSHRC’s policies and approach could be revised to recognize the broader role and research engagement of paid coordinators, such convoluted structures would not be necessary to achieve in practice what we all had to do through various forms of work-around vis a vis the policy.

While the Southern Ontario model had some virtues, the person in the position still noted that it did not recognize her as a co-investigator, thus limiting to some degree the benefit to her in building her academic credentials and career. Given the importance of the coordinator’s role and the value of recruiting qualified people to perform these demanding roles, surely it would be a good strategy to structure the policy governing these roles in ways that maximizes the value of these positions for both the partnerships and the persons holding the positions.

The “divide” between practitioners and academic researchers may also be, in part, a creation of SSHRC regulations regarding salary replacement for community based co-investigators and use of funds. The salary replacement seems to have been modeled after release time funding for academics, with the assumptions that the co-investigators are already salaried research staff (like academics) who simply need to be released from their regular work to do the SSHRC funded research. But the reality in most community organizations is that staff is pushed for time to function fully as collaborators or co-investigators in the general partnership development and functioning, but are not necessarily the people with specific research skills needed to implement research. In the community sector, such people are often independent researchers who are hired by organizations for specific projects. SSHRC’s policy that limits direct salary payments only to people who replace the theoretical staff researcher and don’t allow for direct hiring of community based research staff severely limits the potential direct involvement of community partners in the implementation of research. This can reinforce the divide between the academic and community participants in the research partnership. While some partnerships manage to work within this limitation, others that see significant value in direct community based research involvement find the SSHRC policy an impediment.
The inability for practitioners to be funded beyond travel costs (or other very limited activities) was a continuing point of frustration, especially as the federal government cancelled a proposed funding package to social economy practitioner organizations at the same moment the research centres were beginning. Overcoming this has been an ongoing challenge throughout the life of the CSERP’s. As Heisler, Beckie and Markey note in Chapter 8:

“… it was widely acknowledged by all members that the major obstacle to practitioners fully engaging with BALTA has been the SSHRC funding policy that restricts direct compensation of practitioner involvement in BALTA. This policy therefore presents a dilemma for practitioners wanting to be fully involved in BALTA research, yet at the same time who must fulfill their responsibilities as paid staff in community organizations.” (p. 232)

As much as possible the directors of the node and the Hub sought to find other funding or creative ways to support practitioners. For example, the Northern Node coordinator developed funding applications and received additional funds from other sources for travel of participants from communities to attend workshops/symposia that featured social economy research and allowed for input and recommendations by the practitioners. The Atlantic Node found that offering support to the practitioners to travel to conferences, allowed them to talk to academics and other community groups and be engaged in the knowledge mobilization process. However, if SSHRC is truly committed to supporting real and equitable community participation in these research partnerships, then different funding policies could assist in enabling this to happen.

Were this “divide” removed, it would also remove a major irritant for practitioners or community organizations that often faced yearly funding challenges. The remaining differences in culture would still need to be addressed but the power imbalance created by the SSHRC rules would be gone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are several fundamental premises and conclusions that run through this paper:

1. Community-university partnership, for relevant areas of research, is highly worthwhile and brings the potential to achieve a range of aims that would be difficult or impossible for either community organizations or academic institutions to achieve without the active participation of the other.

2. The effectiveness and impact of the research, both directly and in terms of wider spinoff effects, are greatly enhanced when the partnership goes beyond simple engagement of community partners in ancillary roles and instead create true partnership and co-construction of research and knowledge.
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Such co-construction requires a balancing of power and truly collaborative efforts at all stages throughout the evolution of the partnership and research.

3. Creating real partnership in research takes significant commitment, time, effort and management/facilitation capacity.

In dealing with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) over the past several years, many of us have observed that there is a philosophical commitment to community-university (C-U) research partnership within SSHRC, but this philosophical commitment has not been adequately worked through at the detail of policies, decision making and programs that enhance the effectiveness of SSHRC’s support for such partnership research. In some cases, this seems to lead to approval of partnerships and CURA-type projects that are superficial at best in their approach to partnership. For those seeking to build truly effective and collaborative partnership, we have found that SSHRC’s policies and procedures create some obstacles to doing so.

We are somewhat encouraged by the signals sent through SSHRC’s recent adoption of a new funding architecture with increased attention to evaluating the quality of partnership in project proposals. Time will tell how significantly this impacts on actual decision-making. However, we note that SSHRC’s attention seems to have focused almost entirely outwards in terms of what it can expect from project proposers in terms of ensuring enhanced attention to meaningful partnership, but has still not adequately looked inwards to how SSHRC’s policies and procedures can better support (or continue to handicap) partnership and meaningful community participation in research. Until SSHRC takes this additional step, we feel that what it seeks to achieve with its support for C-U partnerships will continue to be somewhat hamstrung by its own conditions that it imposes on these partnerships.

With respect to this need for SSHRC to re-examine its approach to supporting research partnership at the level of specific policies, we believe it is especially important to take a closer look at the realities of involvement in research by community organizations and to re-tailor policies to better support enhancing of community involvement.

We have also chosen in this paper to highlight the important role that we believe is played by the coordinator-type staff position and the need to adopt policies and procedures that fully recognize and support this role. Our advice in this respect is directed both to SSHRC as the funder, some of whose policies run contrary to fully recognizing this role, and to future lead investigators and co-applicants as they design their partnership research proposals and eventual partnerships. Complex partnerships that are committed to true co-construction of research and knowledge are not easy to develop or manage effectively. They require highly skilled people in both the lead investigator and coordinator roles.
and full recognition of the complementary roles played by both. CSERP has actually been quite successful in the caliber of people they have attracted to the coordinator roles, but like other SSHRC funded CURAs, they have not always been able to maximize their effective use of the people in those roles due both to SSHRC restrictions and lingering institutional attitudes regarding these positions as simply administrative support.

The coordinators played a significant and somewhat diverse role in the research network. Some of the key unifying roles included:

1. Providing a stable, dedicated full time individual to the program and the specific node or the Hub office with 100% commitment to the research program.
2. Coordinators were the critical point of contact for practitioners/community members and for students.
3. Acting as the key point of communication and dissemination of the research.
4. Facilitating networking opportunities across the regions.
5. Assisting in research projects through data collection, supervision of students, editing of papers, literature reviews, and as researchers.
6. Coordinating community engagement and knowledge mobilization.

In suggesting enhanced recognition for the coordinator role and flexibility regarding the involvement of coordinators in research roles, we are not suggesting that they be the lead investigator on a research project, as they should not be consumed by conducting research at the cost of their other responsibilities. Our point is that affective complex research partnerships require both a lead investigator and a coordinator, that both play vitally important roles, and that the best partnerships make the most of both roles. Being a part of a research team and playing a role in the research projects as required should be allowed for coordinators. This creates a greater connection with the community/practitioner team members and the researchers. It would not be for all projects but as required and determined through a research team approach. It gives recognition to the abilities of the coordinators to facilitate and help in the development of the research, allowing them to provide their input and recommendations and assist where possible. One of the coordinators has pointed out that the position was advertised in some cases as requiring a Master degree but because of the SSHRC guidelines for the Social Economy Suite, this lead to having someone in place with skills and experience that could not effectively be used – as well as some degree of frustration on the part of the incumbent who may have been lured by the promise of involvement in research and then basically told “hands off.”

In the experience of the CSERP coordinators, they needed to have a trusted relationship with the principal investigator (PI) and community leads. Since the university base did the administration and financial management of the
project, the coordinator had to be trusted by the community partners in terms of their application of SSHRC and university rules. The ability to communicate transparent rules applicable to all involved especially in dealing with financial matters was important. The coordinator needed to have the authority and the support of the principal investigator in their application of rules.

As CSERP evolved, the coordinators collectively began to take on a larger role in decision-making. For example, if the principal investigator was not able to attend monthly meetings, the coordinators joined the calls and contributed. They attended the ANSER and CASC yearly conferences and often presented. They contributed to the knowledge mobilization projects and where instrumental in devising innovative ways to communicate the research.

The Southern Ontario experience points to a model that highlighted the role of the coordinator as both a lead in terms of administration but also as contributing to the research mandate of CSERP. This twin role of administration and research is a useful point for considering a model for future community-university research partnership. The principal investigator must also see the coordinator as a person who will enable the research to take place – a person dedicated to the project with the time and skill to support the interest of the PI.

**Recommendations**

1. Ensure that the job description for community-university research partnership “coordinators” emphasizes the linking role and the contribution it has to the research endeavor.

2. Ensure that the salary and sphere of authority reflects the fulcrum role of the coordinator.

3. Ensure that there is a written agreement or Memorandum of Agreement on how finances and decisions will be made between the university and community lead. This document should also establish that all involved in the Partnership must abide by SSHRC and host university policies.

4. The principal investigator and community lead must commit to setting time aside regularly to plan, resolve administrative issues and iron out the differences that arise.

5. The coordinator must be empowered to support practitioners and facilitate their engagement with the academic community.

6. Community organizations who partner with universities to engage in research must internalize the project within their agency. They need to find ways to engage the whole agency in the partnership. It cannot be delegated to only one person as representing the agency.
7. There must be a way to provide a stipend or salary replacement to community agencies that provide leadership to research projects.

8. The Knowledge Mobilization activities must be planned and funded from the beginning of the project. It cannot be left to the last year of the project and has to have the input of the community lead agency.

9. The coordinator should be seen as a “pracademic” (Van Til, in Salipante and Aram, 2003) in their engagement and contribution to the research mandate of the partnership.

The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships over the past six years benefited from the dedication of over 300 engaged academics, practitioners, students and staff. Its success was due in part to the tenacity of the Hub and node coordinators who worked hard to mitigate the challenges of working with two very different institutional realities, who initiated innovative knowledge mobilization tools, coached students and often acted as a spokesperson on the social economy. Their role, including engagement in the research mandate of the partnership, must be recognized in the selection process of candidates and in the decision-making within the partnership.

Their experience points to the importance of community-university research partnerships having a full time dedicated coordinator with the skills and experience to navigate the two different cultures in the partnership. It should be noted that the coordinators all stayed with CSERP and recognized how crucial their role was in supporting the research and knowledge mobilization mandate of CSERP. As CSERP winds down, some of the coordinators are using their experience to pursue academic careers, use newly acquired research and writing skills to publish articles of their own, or seek further community-university research assignments. As members of a community-university research partnership endeavor, their practice has been enriched by the six years spent with CSERP.
References


