Kamúcwkalha¹: Canadian Approaches to Community-University Research Partnerships

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The widening of the circle of knowledge is a quintessentially Canadian notion. We have worked hard in our country to build an education system that balances equality of opportunity and excellence. I’m confident that if any nation in the world can build a true democracy of knowledge, it’s Canada. (Hon. David Johnson, Governor-General of Canada, May 26, 2012)

History of CBR in Canada

In Canada we can divide the history of community based research into three periods: The foundational years (to 1998), the institutionalization period (1998–2012) and the national engagement period that we are currently experiencing. The foundational years end with the creation of the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) funding window in 1998. The institutionalization period covers the years between the creation of the CURA mechanism and May 26, 2012, when the Honourable David Johnson, Governor General of Canada, delivered the opening keynote address to the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences on the democratization of knowledge.

The foundational years include experiences with Frontier College (1899); the university extension programmes of the University of Alberta, (1912); the Antigonish Movement at St. Francis Xavier University (1930s-60s); the Workers’

¹ - Kamúcwkalha i Kà-mú-kà-shà means the energy of a group attuned to its collectivity in the language of the Lil’wat First Nations People
Education Association with links to the University of Toronto (1930s); the emergence of Indigenous researchers breaking free of colonial research models (1960s-90s); the development of university structures such as Service aux Collectivités at the UQAM in Quebec (1970s); the participatory research network’s sharing of traditions inspired by work in Africa, Asia and Latin America (1970s and 80s); knowledge creation in social movements such as Gay/Lesbian/Queer movement influence in HIV/AIDS research (1980s); women’s movements linking knowledge to taking action for health, and against violence and poverty (1970s and 80s); the establishment of the Community Based Research Centre in Ontario (1982); and the development of the community psychology movement (Flicker, Savan, McGrath et. al, 2008; Graham, 2014; Hall, 1992, 2005; Hall & Berube, 2009, 2014; Lord, Schnarr & Hutchinson, 1993; Ochocka & Jantzen, 2014; Travers et. al, 2008).

Prior to 1998, the community based research movement was centred outside the walls of academia. University linkages were limited to individual activist scholars with personal involvement in a variety of social movements. Canada had a deep and politically oriented practice of activist researchers working in the labour movements, the anti-apartheid movements, struggles for Indigenous sovereignty and more. But, during the foundational years there were no courses on participatory or community-based scholarship, no Deans of engaged learning, no Vice-Presidents for community outreach, no degree programmes and in fact little academic presence at all. There was, however, plenty of community-based research!

The creation of the SSHRC Community University Research Alliance granting opportunities, itself inspired by the early participatory research traditions from Toronto, the Quebec university community experiences and the Dutch ‘Science Shop” movement of the late 70s and 80s, marked the beginning of the institutionalization era. Academics whose ideological or epistemological preferences were aligned to working with community groups flooded the SSHRC offices with proposals which were, for the first time, products of alliances between scholars based in universities and scholar-intellectuals located in community groups. So great was the interest in CURA grants and the built-up demand for funding windows of this nature that the SSHRC grants soon became the most competitive of any of the SSHRC grants, meaning that it had the highest ratio of applicants to awards of the various funding windows It was the CURAs that laid the contemporary foundations of the engaged scholarship practices in Canada, not the work of Boyer and others in the United States (Hall, 2005).

The engagement era began May 26, 2012 in Kitchener, Waterloo, when David Johnston, the Governor General of Canada, called on universities and communities to become closer partners in knowledge production and use. He told the assembled scholars:
As a scholar—a Canadian scholar—I believe we must reconsider the role of scholarship in how we apply our learning, in how we make knowledge more widely available to Canadians, and in how we further democratize knowledge for all people. (Governor General of Canada, 2012)

The fact that the Canadian head of state, however symbolic his role, would choose to speak about knowledge and community was a signal that community-based research had come of age. By 2015, Canadians have a national scene where nearly every university has community-based research or its equivalent written into their strategic plans, has some kind of community-university research support structure, or both. Simon Fraser University, for example, has rebranded itself as “The Engaged University” with “engaged research, engaged communities and engaged students” in its logo. As the SFU President Andrew Petter noted, “Our Strategic Vision demonstrates how a university, by integrating commitments to community engagement into its educational, research and other activities, can generate deep and lasting benefits for itself and for its communities”.

The rise of Indigenous research approaches and an Indigenous academic research community needs to be understood in order to understand the Canadian CBR experience. Research along with education has historically been a loaded and highly negative experience in Indigenous communities. As Hanselmann (2001, p.3) has noted, Indigenous peoples “are the most studied-but least understood-group in Canadian society”. Research has been used to subjugate and oppress Indigenous peoples for over a century. Indigenous resistance to top-down, extractive research has accelerated the advance of Indigenous research approaches, most of which are community-based. Indigenous communities have been at the forefront in creating the “OCAP” principles of health research. OCAP refers to ownership, control, access and possession of the knowledge generated in a research process. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) of 1996 created a research unit to carry out its mandate of assessing the cultural, political, educational and economic challenges for Aboriginal people living in Canada. The research unit was mandated to follow principles of Indigenous participatory research, and supported hundreds of Indigenous researchers to carry out a wide range of community based studies. This research unit and their innovative work created a powerful foundation for CBR in Canada.

The Arctic and Northern Territories, the home of Inuit and First Nations Peoples as well as diverse settler populations, have also played an important role in the development of community based participatory research in Canada. In these regions, distances are vast and populations are small. There are few post-secondary institutions and local university research communities are virtually non-existent. Research practice has, by necessity, been created with a home grown, local character that links Indigenous leadership with government services and settler researchers. Community-based participatory research has often been the approach of choice over the past years throughout these territories. The work is supported by
the Arctic Institute for Community-based Research, which works in all three of the Arctic territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), and is jointly governed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership (see Arctic Institute of Community Based Research, n.d.).

The Canadian CBR Policy Environment

Canada is a Federation of twelve provinces and territories. It has no federal ministry of education, nor federal ministry of higher education nor university-grants council. Primarily the provincial governments fund higher education. There is a Council of Education made up of provincial and territorial Ministries of Education, but this body is given little power as the control of education is a constitutional right given to the provinces and vigorously defended. Quebec has historically been ahead of the rest of Canada in supporting CBR. Researchers benefit from supportive Quebec policies and also have access to trends happening in the rest of Canada such as funding arrangements and research networks. Canada now has a policy climate that is favourable to the institutionalization or mainstreaming of community based research. This favourable climate is based on four sources: the partnership principles of SSHRC and other funding agencies; the early institutionalization and policy initiatives in Quebec; the creation of the Community-Campus Collaboration Initiative and the statements of the Governor General and recommendations of the AUCC to its members.

Quebec has historically had a stronger sense of collectivity and community action than the rest of Canada, which was evident in the 1970s when the Service aux Collectivités structure was created in the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and elsewhere. It can also be seen today with the creation of community information structures designed to support the dissemination of co-constructed knowledge, practice, experience and research to better serve community needs. In 2013, the Government of Quebec supported the establishment of a new overarching group, Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS), to support the development of the social economy. This new structure is a direct result of collaborations between the social economy sector and academics.

The Honourable David Johnson, whose keynote speech to the Humanities and Social Science community in 2012 announced a new era for CBR, also lent his name and prestige to the creation of the Community-Campus Collaboration Initiative (CCCI), which brought together the AUCC, the SSHRC, and the United Way of Canada with key CUE leaders and funders. The stated purpose of the CCCI is to “increase the capacity of Canadian communities to develop and implement innovative and sustainable solutions to address the variety of complex challenges that face them by linking more effectively to the resources and expertise of post-secondary institutions” (One World, 2012).

The Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) is the umbrella organization of Canadian universities and colleges. In the absence of
a federal governmental dossier on higher education, the AUCC plays a critical agenda-setting role for higher education. In 2013/14 they initiated a Working Group on Campus Community engagement chaired by President Andrew Petter of Simon Fraser University. Their final communiqué states that “all members were encouraged to deepen community partnerships, appropriate to their institutions’ missions, because of the significant benefits for both parties” (AUCC, 2013). In addition and in support of the engagement agenda, Paul Davidson, the President of the AUCC, and Ian Bird, the Director of Community Foundations of Canada issued this joint challenge to the university and community sectors,

We are calling for a cultural shift in how we address community needs, how we prepare for the unexpected and how we pursue opportunities. Collaborations and partnerships must be standard operating procedure from the earliest stages of new ideas and initiatives for building community resiliency and prosperity. (Davidson & Bird, 2013)

David Johnson added these thoughts at CUexpo 2013 in Newfoundland:

…when it comes to bringing about positive change, this is where universities and communities can work together to great effect. Communities know what the needs are, and post-secondary institutions know the methods and possess the experience and the expertise to help determine how to go about meeting those needs—a wonderful combination of the what and the why. (Johnson, 2013)

**Partnership Funding with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council**

We have mentioned the critical role played by the creation of the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant in 1998. It would be useful to elaborate further on the nature of that grant and on the evolution of SSHRC funding into what they call a partnership funding strategy that cuts across the entire funding structure by 2015. The original CURA programme was developed requiring successful applications to be partnerships between community bodies and academics. The grants initially were for periods of one to three years for amounts of $75-200 thousand. So attractive was this granting category that within a few years, the grant became the most competitive of all SSHRC grant categories, with the highest proportion of applicants to available funding.

SSHRC recognized that the issues facing Canadians were ones that were often beyond the reach of single disciplinary approaches. They felt that for social sciences and humanities research to have the most impact on our collective futures, community groups, businesses and academics would have to find new ways to work across disciplines and sectors. With this in mind, and drawing from the experience of the CURA grants, they initiated the current ‘partnership strategy’ that is the current approach. The CURA grant was discontinued, but the principles involved in that grant were spread across virtually the entire funding programme.
In 2014, SSHRC made $337 million worth of grants to 8,674 projects. Of this, $120 million went to 1200 Aboriginal research grants. Both university and non-university partners may apply and hold the grants, although it is still most common for university partners to provide the administrative support. There are also Partnership Development Grants, designed to help build research partnerships. These are for one to three years and are valued at between $75 and $200 thousand dollars. If a more mature partnership has already been established, Partnership Grants for four to seven years at a value of up to $2.5 million are available. Crystal Tremblay and Budd Hall have done a study of the social and economic contributions of some of SSHRC funded work in a recent article in the International Journal of Action Research (Tremblay & Hall, 2014). It is also important to note that the partnerships may also include international partners.

National Networks

Canadians have created four national networks that support CBR efforts. Research Impact, founded by York University and the University of Victoria and based at York University has a focus on knowledge mobilization (researchimpact.ca). The Community Engaged Scholarship Partnership based at Guelph University works on university policies such as career advancement and credit for work in the community (www.cespartnership.com). The Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning based at Carleton University links community and university groups working with students’ experiential learning in community, (www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/). Finally, Community Based Research Canada, which is based at the University of Victoria and the Centre for CBR in Kitchener Waterloo, links universities and community groups in order to expand and strengthen investment, quality and impact in the field (communityresearchcanada.ca).

Community Based Research Canada and the Community University Expositions (CUExpos)

Community Based Research Canada (CBRC) has emerged as the network with the most inclusive range of members, being open to all Canadian universities and other national NGOs involved in community based research. CBRC’s mission is to be a “national champion and facilitator for collaborative community based research and community engagement in Canada” (Community Based Research Canada, 2015). CBRC’s raison d’etre and mandate are nested within a national research ecosystem whereby post-secondary institutions and allied research organizations engage on an equal footing with community partners to address societal challenges and achieve positive impacts for the benefit of Canada and Canadians. CBRC plays a coordinating, convening and enabling role to harness research resources and assets and to facilitate and build collaborative relationships, especially between community partners and universities, colleges and hospitals, in ways that might not otherwise occur or be sustained. CBRC sits at the table of
the Campus Community Collaborative Initiative championed by the Governor General of Canada and has recently hosted a national summit to look at establishing centres of excellence to address major societal issues in Canada. CBRC organizes the biennial gatherings of the national CBR community - the Community University Expositions or CUexpos.

In 2003, the University of Saskatchewan organized the first event that brought together as many of the early SSHRC Community University Research Alliance grant holders as possible. They called this meeting CUExpo. It was a big success and was one of the first times ever that researchers located in community organizations were present in equal numbers, and as equals in research terms, as university based local researchers. The hunger for this kind of space, outside of academic circles and outside of government circles, led to a second CUexpo in Winnipeg in 2005, a third in Victoria, BC (2008) and others in Kitchener-Waterloo (2011), Corner Brook, Newfoundland (2013) and Ottawa (2015) (for more about the CUExpo movement see Ochocka, 2014). CUExpos are the places where good practices are shared, new funders met, project ideas tried out, good work celebrated and individual learning flourishes. It is a wonderfully creative space where the arts, Indigenous ceremonies, spoken word and more are found. It can be argued that without CUExpo there would be no CUE movement in Canada.

A Diversity of Research Partnership Structures

In the Canadian context, history, traditions, and policy directions have led to the creation of a wide variety of institutional structures for the facilitation of community-university research partnerships. These structures fall under four main categories: community controlled, government led, comprehensive university structures and disciplinary or issue-based university structures. Examples of community structures are the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, the Community Social Planning Council in Victoria and other cities, and the Centre for Community Based Research in Kitchener-Waterloo. An example of a government led structure is the Office of Public Engagement of the Government of Newfoundland (www.ope.gov.nl.ca/). York University with its knowledge mobilization unit, the University of Victoria with its collection of structures including an Engagement Advisor and the Office of Public Engagement of the Memorial University of Newfoundland are examples of comprehensive structures that aspire to cover all disciplines.

Community partners jointly govern some of the later types of structures and university partners (such as the University of Victoria and UQAM) while the universities wholly govern others. Most of the structures remain within single disciplines or sectors, for example the Research Shop which is linked to Social Sciences at Guelph (www.theresearchshop.ca); the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP) at the University of Alberta (www.cup.ualberta.ca) or the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation (www.carleton.ca/3ci).
Recognizing CBR for Career Advancement in Canadian Universities

The Community Engaged Scholarship Partnership, a network of eight Canadian universities committed to advancing this work across the country, has challenged academic institutions’ “culture, policies and practices in order to recognize and reward CES” (Community Engaged Scholarship Partnership (CESP), 2015, para.2). In a study of 16 Canadian universities, they concluded that while many universities have inserted the language of community engaged scholarship, CBR, or something similar into their strategic plans (Barreno et al., 2013), there remains a gap between the rhetoric and the recognition of CBR for tenure and promotion purposes or annual merit pay. Working conditions for academics within universities in Canada are regulated by the collective agreements in each institution setting out all aspects of working life. Their study indicated that the collective agreements were virtually silent on the question of recognizing CBR for tenure and promotion purposes. The experiences ‘on the ground’ in the universities was found to be more positive. The University of Victoria was found to have the most overall institutional support for CBR, but their interviews revealed a long and active history of CBR and much innovation and openness to recognizing engaged scholarship as something to be taken into account for career progress. Specific language on how to recognize excellence in CBR has been found in documents from the College of Social Sciences at the University of Guelph, the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, the Faculties of Humanities and Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. The CES Partnership has developed an implementation handbook that would be of interest to those in Canada and other parts of the world (CESP, 2015).

Four Organizational Approaches to Facilitating Community-University Research Partnerships

The Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR)

The Centre of Community Based Research (CCBR) is an independent, non-profit organization, located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario since 1982. CCBR has played a key role in pioneering community-based research (CBR) in Canada and has been a national leader in CBR engagement. The founder of CCBR, Dr. John Lord, had experience as a university-based researcher, but saw the need for research to be more closely linked to community-based work. He was also interested in how research could provide insight into innovation and be more relevant to social change. He worked with others to facilitate collaboration among academics, consumers, service providers, and advocates.

Early CCBR researchers recognized that they were promoting a view of education and research epistemology that was very marginal in Canada. From the beginning, CCBR embraced participatory approaches to both teaching and research,
using both qualitative and quantitative methods, local knowledge, and on-going campus-community engagement. In order to ensure that CCBR, with this new approach to research, had the independence to provide a true alternative to academic research, it was incorporated as a charitable, not-for-profit organization. Board membership was expanded to include consumers, researchers, service providers, academics, and advocates, in order to ensure that CCBR remained grounded in the experiences of those who make use of human services.

In 1996, CCBR experienced major changes in staff and leadership. The responsibility for developing new projects and finding new research areas was shared by a team of experienced senior staff, including Dr. Andrew Taylor, Dr. Rich Janzen and Dr. Joanna Ochocka as CCBR’s executive director. Project theme areas began to spread beyond the initial focus on disability issues, which increased the number and variety of research projects. This was also a time when many university students became involved in CBR through their practicum under the supervision of senior staff. Some of these students developed and completed their academic theses at CCBR, and some went on to become CCBR staff.

Since this broadening of focus, CCBR has conducted many complex multi-year, multi-method and multi-partner partnerships with the result of mobilizing knowledge for innovation and social change. Some examples of theme areas include early childhood development and family support, which began with a provincial evaluation of Community Action Programs for Children. Another theme area was immigration, starting with a 1998 report entitled Dignity and Opportunity, leading to a series of interconnected projects including the 2001 Immigrant Parenting provincial study. Another major undertaking was a seven-year study of Consumer/Survivor Initiatives in Ontario that was conducted in partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

The development of an evaluation framework for twenty-six provincially funded early childhood initiatives was a highlight of the CCBR’s on-going program of research on interventions that support families with young children. In 2005, CCBR initiated a five-year Community University Research Alliance (CURA) on mental health and cultural diversity bringing together over 40 partners. This research developed a theoretical framework for improving mental health services for cultural communities with six demonstration projects with secured external funding beyond the study. CCBR is also one of only four non-academic institutions which received SSHRC provisional eligibility.

Researchers at CCBR have always seen this organization as one that twins community research and education. Since 1997, graduate and undergraduate classes offered in local universities have been taught by CCBR staff. Student interns, community learners and volunteers have always been an important part of CCBR life. Staff members frequently offer workshops on CBR and often hire and train community researchers who have direct personal experience with the issues under study. As CBR is mainstreaming in Canada, CCBR’s role is expand-
ing. With over 370 research projects completed, CCBR is well positioned to build capacity for CBR through academic education, community training, publishing, and presentations. Recent CCBR work with scholars and government officials in the province of Newfoundland and in Indonesia have been successful examples.

The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

The Service aux collectivités (SAC) of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) was established in 1979 to build capacity for community-university partnerships that address concerns brought by communities. The SAC mandate is to promote, coordinate and facilitate community-based training (CBT) and community-based research (CBR) activities to be carried out by faculty members in collaboration with NGOs. All faculty members that are interested in such an approach can be helped and accompanied by the SAC. An institutional policy was adopted, recognizing and integrating these activities as part of the regular tasks of faculty members. Therefore, these activities were not considered as extension or outreach but were integrated into the research and teaching activities of faculty members. Concrete means were implemented to facilitate and encourage the development of such activities conducted in partnership. Amongst these, a Board of Community Services was established, as well as financial support through seed money for research projects, hours of training activities, and project coordinators dedicated to the development of CRC and CBT projects.

Steered by eight community representatives and eight university leaders, the Board of Community Services provides recommendations on community-university engagement and evaluates research and training projects that are presented for institutional support. $100,000 to support students participation in research projects (CBR), and 900 hours of training activities (CBT) to faculty members are provided annually are provided by UQAM. This seed money often provides leverage for more substantial financial support from federal or provincial granting agencies.

Since its foundation, the SAC has conducted more than a thousand research and training activities, has initiated two major partnership grants and was involved in several major grants provided by the provincial government. Annually, more than a hundred projects involving as much faculty members, students and NGO’s are on-going. These projects, action-oriented, are designed to enhance the quality of life and the economic, environmental, cultural and social well being of communities. Based on a cross-cultural perspective -scientific and practitioner views- academics and NGOs have established a knowledge dialogue through these projects.

The work at UQAM is an example of a successful community-university partnership in the social economy. Coordinating networks of researchers and community partners developed social-economy related research directed by communities. Sharing knowledge and practices between universities and communities stimulated engagement by bridging spheres of research and action.
Between 2000 and 2006, over 100 research projects were completed, which led to the publication of research findings and the organization of seminars, workshops, and conferences. These activities were carried out by more than 160 researchers and partners who are active in the social economy, from universities, research centres, and various collective businesses and non-profit organizations, mostly based in Québec, but also in the rest of Canada and many other countries... (ARUC-ÉS & RQRP-ÉS, n.d.).

The University of Victoria (UVic)

The Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR) was established in 2007, with Dr. Budd Hall named as its director, to build capacity for community-university research partnerships that would enhance the quality of life and the economic, environmental and social well-being of communities. Jointly steered by community and university leaders, the OCBR garnered attention from academic and community foundations, granting agencies that were keen for new approaches to create social change in areas such as housing affordability, community planning, Indigenous language and culture revitalization and food security.

Building on the success of the flagship OCBR and the commitment of the university to community engagement articulated in the UVic strategic plan, several task forces and working groups were formed that resulted in UVic embarking on the development of an enhanced structure to support community-university engagement broadly, and within that, support for CBR. While community engagement had been identified in the strategic vision of the institution, the momentum for community engagement actions and strategies happened from the ground up. The UVic reputation is that of being practitioners of community engagement.

In early 2013, the academic leadership retreat focused on community-university engagement, affirming the commitment to community-university engagement. A new infrastructure of support for community engagement was subsequently developed, including a senior level coordinating council, and several new initiatives were launched. For example, the Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization unit was created within the Office of Research Services to provide administrative support services to the development of research partnerships and to the facilitation of knowledge mobilization. In addition, two new senior positions were created: the Special Advisor on Community Engagement and the Director of Indigenous Academics and Community Engagement. Another initiative was the Engaged Scholar Awards, which were established as distinguished professorship to recognize excellence in community engaged research and scholarship. Finally, CUVIC2014, a global conference on community-university engagement was held with great success.

As part of this new infrastructure, a new research centre, the Institute for Studies and Innovation in Community-University Engagement, was created as...
a ‘doing think-tank’ to extend the work of the OCBR, nurture innovation in community engaged research and to study community engagement.

The Institute for Studies and Innovation in Community-University Engagement (ISICUE) works with other research centres and units that conduct community-engaged research and with community partners to assist in building capacity for CBR, to build collaborative initiatives, to develop insight into the practices of community engagement and to support regional, national and global networks. It has retained the foundational values of the OCBR: respecting multiple ways of knowing and learning; valuing interdisciplinarity as necessary to address the complex issues of our times; recognizing the transformative power of knowledge and community mobilization; and honouring the value of universities and communities working in partnership. As a champion for CBR, ISICUE hosts innovative initiatives in the practice of CBR such as the Indigenous Child Wellbeing Research Network, the Pacific Housing Research Network and the Community Mapping Collaboratory. It is involved in research about community engagement including a networks study, an exploration into the role of students in knowledge mobilization and the development of a collective impact framework for community engaged research.

The UVic administration intends to build on the success of these recent initiatives and is developing an institution-wide framework for community-engagement. Community-engaged research is one of five strategic components in this emerging framework that will see a continued enhanced commitment to community-engagement. The components of community-engaged learning, knowledge mobilization, good neighbour and institutional policies round out the framework that is designed to facilitate integration across the sectors of the university.

British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC)

The BCAAFC is a provincial umbrella association for twenty-five Friendship Centres throughout the province. It is part of a national movement of urban non-profit social service organizations known as Friendship Centres that work to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada. Located in Victoria, BC, the BCAAFC has offered policy and program support to its member Friendship Centres for over 40 years. Governed by their members, they enjoy an Elders Council and a Youth Council that often engage in collaborative initiatives.

A key aim of the BCAAFC is to build capacity in Aboriginal communities, and they have developed a “5 by 5” plan to facilitate employment opportunities for five thousand people over in the next five years. Liaison and advocacy with government is a key role as they negotiate for resources to enable local Friendship Centres to provide programming that supports the 5 by 5 plan. From youth training programs to social innovation initiatives, the BCAAFC offers expertise and support to local Centres. Other areas of policy and programming work include infant and
child development, family violence, and financial literacy. The BCAAFC works in partnership with governments and other agencies in the development of policies and programs. For example, it is a partner with First Nations Health Authorities, Métis Nation B and the federal and provincial governments in the development of an Aboriginal mental wellness and substance use plan.

The BCAAFC has some signature initiatives as part of its repertoire. It hosts an annual youth conference, Gathering Our Voices, that last year saw 2000 Aboriginal youth plus chaperones, exhibitors and mentors come together for a week to explore, learn and engage with their culture. It also was the initiator of the Moosehide Campaign, a grassroots movement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men who are standing up against violence towards women and children. Wearing a small patch of moose hide to symbolize their commitment, they are working in the spirit of brotherhood to protect Aboriginal women and children.

The BCAAFC has recognized the importance of research and policy analysis to its work. As a non-profit organization with limited resources, it has partnered with others to continue to build its capacity in these areas. As it is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the approach to research taken up through the BCAAFC brings new opportunities for learning and knowledge creation through its partnerships.

The Indigenous Outcomes Measurement Initiative was designed to articulate outcomes that are meaningful to Indigenous people and organizations. This initiative developed in response to a growing understanding that performance management processes designed for non-Aboriginal children and families shape service delivery in a manner that may not enhance outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. This initiative attempts to ground the development of processes and indicators in the realities of families and communities and is helping the BCAAFC redefine their contract reporting requirement and contract management processes.

The Aboriginal Non-Profit Sector Human Resource and Workplace Strategy Initiative aims to strengthen the Aboriginal non-profit workforce, increase attraction and retention of Aboriginal employees and enhance workplace wellness. As part of this initiative, extensive community-engaged research was conducted. Partnerships with Indigenous researchers, consultants and universities facilitated this work. One project in this initiative inventoried promising practices for the incorporation of cultural and traditional values in the workplace and developed a cultural assessment tool for agencies. In their 2013 report (see www.aboriginalnonprofits.com) it notes that the research team was assembled to facilitate an ‘Indigenous Approach’ and included people with expertise in cultural knowledge and protocols, facilitation, community-based research with Indigenous peoples, non-profit administration, data analysis and human resource management.

The BCAAFC is also a participating partner in the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, a national research network of urban Aboriginal com-
munities, policymakers and academics engaging in community driven research (see www.uakn.org). It is a partner in the Indigenous Child Wellbeing Research Network that strives to support research that is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. As Paul Lacerte, executive director of the BCAAFC stressed in a recent conference presentation at the University of Victoria, research partnerships are important to the BCAAFC and these partnerships are built on relationships with people, not institutions. Bruce Parisian, treasurer of the BCAAFC commented on the desire to grow research capacity within the Friendship Centre movement. “If every Centre could have the capacity to do research it would be a huge help in developing better services for the urban people we serve. We need to understand the needs and strengths of our communities and how we can best work with them” (personal communication, 2014).

CHALLENGES

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Canada has been striving to reconcile with Indigenous peoples, but key policy structures such as the Indian Act along with continuing colonizing practices, often reinforced through Western research and knowledge construction, as well as unequal resources, make reconciliation an inappropriate goal. Rather, attention to building relationships of dignity holds promise.

Engaging Philanthropy

Imagine Canada, Community Foundations of Canada and other research foundations are important to the creation of knowledge for the betterment of society. The foundations are having an increasing role in investing in the creation and support of new ideas and strategies for our society. Social innovation and community engagement are current discourses where foundations are often leading the initiatives. The Governor General’s CCCI initiative saw foundations taking a key role in defining the relationship between universities and communities.

Building Research Capacity in Non-profit/Civil Society Organizations

The non-profit sector does not have the capacity for research that universities enjoy. They do not necessarily want extensive capacity to do their own research, but rather the capacity to engage with universities, whose mandate is to do research, in order to conduct research that is of use to civil society. Current funding mechanisms such as SSHRC do not make getting resources to the community very easy to do. The university is still ‘at the centre’ of the research funding endeavour which can place the NGO in a passive position.

Getting the Provinces on Board

The mandate for higher education in Canada is provincial rather than
national. Engaging government is important in CUE research, but the different provincial regimes make having a national strategy or support system difficult. The Province of Newfoundland co-hosted CUEXpo 2013 and has taken a lead in the initiative to interest the other provinces in investment in and support of community campus engaged scholarship. May of 2015 saw the first of several inter-provincial meetings.

**Working Nationally**

Canada is a big country with its people concentrated in several cities. This physical size makes collaboration difficult and community based researchers often rely on technology to facilitate communication and collaboration. Partnering with another region in Canada is often more difficult than partnering with another country. Relationships matter, and the sheer size and diversity of Canada make building these relationships very interesting and challenging work.

**Building More Faculty Interest**

One of the challenges UQAM in Quebec is facing is to increase the number of faculty members willing to engage their research activities into these non-traditional approaches, and in addition, to have recognition institutionally and among peers for their work. For example, in 2031, ninety-five out of one thousand faculty members were involved in 100 projects, and the majority of these academics originated from social sciences and humanities. While the ninety-five professors indicated is impressive, there is clearly room to expand this work.

**Broadening support from other funding bodies**

A major issue remains the lack of recognition from granting agencies of such partnerships, mainly in natural sciences and engineering, and evaluation of academia’s scientific production based almost solely on mainstream peer-reviewed publications. Only a few programs of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council encourage and recognize university-community partnerships and evaluate differently the scientific production.

**Issue Complexity**

Another challenge is related to complexity of issues brought up by community partners often requiring follow-up accompanying measures. An example is provided by the project called “A Pension Plan Made to Measure” that was set up to remedy the lack of a pension plan for 80,000 employees, mostly women, in Quebec’s NGOs and social economy sector. With the support of a university resource, a pension plan adapted to the community movement’s needs and constraints was elaborated. The plan manages 15 million dollars and has a growing membership of 3,210 employees from 416 different community and women’s groups (Régime de retraite, n.d.).
Conclusion

Canada has a long history of community-based research linked to many of the major social movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. In spite of the decentralised nature of higher education funding and governance in Canada, a national policy environment has emerged that supports institutional change towards stronger community-university research partnerships. The next phase of research partnership development will be a focus on specific sectors where barriers to a just and sustainable society still exist.

References


