

## **Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)**

### ***Community-University Research Partnership: An Introduction and Overview***

*By Nicole Rosenow-Redhead, MA*

Communities and universities can, and should, be natural partners when it comes to initiating and organizing collaborative research regarding societal issues to effect subsequent positive and enduring change. Through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) ([http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program\\_descriptions/cura\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/cura_e.asp)), numerous community and university partnerships have been created. Research partnerships among those offering complimentary strengths are essential to the long-term health of our communities, for example, conducting research that draws on the strengths and experiences of both university and community partners is likely to be of considerable value in informing dialogue and action in relevant fields of public policy. Community activists and academics can collaborate around a multitude of issues. These can include:

- Defining the themes and topics
- Employing participatory processes regarding the construction of the framework
- Researching historical theories and patterns<sup>1</sup>
- Analyzing issues based on accounts of how people actually experience them
- Choice of appropriate methodologies and data analysis techniques

When thoughtful and respectful collaboration occurs, sincere capacity building can ensue for both university-based and community-based collaborators as issues gain visibility, assumptions are challenged, research is undertaken, findings analysed, and knowledge is mobilized.

Numerous advantages and challenges attend community-university partnerships. Many of those who engage in collaborative research reflect and comment on their experiences, offering insights useful to other teams.

### **Strengths**

There are significant advantages to pursuing research partnerships. Some examples include:

- All of the those concerned are present; for some, it may be the first time their contribution is being heard and valued
- Considerable change can occur from the outset<sup>2</sup>
- It encompasses domains of research that would likely be closed to outside researchers, such as with at-risk populations<sup>3</sup>
- Results can be substantially more persuasive<sup>4</sup>
- Many challenges and obstacles can be lessened or avoided altogether if those involved discuss their needs, goals, and expectations, etc. at the beginning
- ‘Lessons learned’ can be shared and applied in future partnerships<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Arsenault, Rina. (‘Collaborative Research: What is it? How to do it? How to use it?’)

<sup>3</sup> Vaillancourt, Yves, Dr. – ‘Democratizing Knowledge: Research Experiments Based on University-Community Partnerships’ 17/10/05

<sup>4</sup> Arsenault, Rina. (‘Collaborative Research: What is it? How to do it? How to use it?’)

<sup>5</sup> ARUC-Research Partnerships: The ARUC-ES and RQRP-ES Model; April 2007

## **Challenges**

Some examples of common challenges include:

- High probability for misunderstandings, e.g. people will use different terminology, and may misconstrue one another's terms
- Process is slow; e.g. building consensus takes time and everyone involved is likely to be juggling other commitments
- Managing different agendas<sup>6</sup>, and agreeing on main point; i.e. which communities/populations are we attempting to empower?
- Partnership research entails a 'real sharing of power and resources between academics and practitioners'<sup>7</sup>; this can be difficult to achieve and maintain
- As many institutions are inherently hierarchal, participation and involvement may be limited<sup>8</sup> - partners are constrained by their home institutions
- The culture of academia has not typically been conducive to these sorts of partnerships

The material below can help you investigate more deeply the subject of community-university research partnerships.

## **Sites that have information about making CURAs work well:**

- **Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR)** facilitates partnerships between the university and the larger community in order to engage in relevant social research that supports a deeper understanding of our communities and that reveals opportunities for improving our quality of life. <http://www.usask.ca/cuisr>
- **The Community-University Exposition 2008 - CUexpo08** is now over but this site (<http://www.cuexpo08.ca/index.php>) will remain as an archive of the historic 3 day exposition, the largest gathering in Canadian history of community and university groups working together for community well-being, locally and globally.
- **Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement** - Gateways is a new refereed journal concerned with the practice and processes of community research and other forms of engagement. Check out its inaugural issue at <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/ijcre/index>
- **University of Victoria - Office of Community-Based Research** is working to provide useful space for community and university researchers to strengthen their work and build solutions for community-centred change. <http://web.uvic.ca/ocbr/index.html>

## **Examples of active CURAs:**

- **Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (CRISES)**  
Le CRISES est un centre de recherche interuniversitaire et pluridisciplinaire qui regroupe une soixantaine de chercheurs affiliés principalement à sept institutions universitaires. Plusieurs

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Vaillancourt, Yves, Dr. – 'Democratizing Knowledge: Research Experiments Based on University-Community Partnerships' 17/10/05

<sup>8</sup> Stringer, Ernie, Ph.D., Genat, William, Ph.D. 'Action Research in Health' Pearson Education, Inc. 2004

des travaux de recherche réalisés par ses membres sont effectués en partenariat avec des acteurs socio-économiques. (Disponible aussi en anglais et español) [www.crisis.uqam.ca](http://www.crisis.uqam.ca)

- **Canadian Social Economy Hub** – This group is itself a CURA, and lists on its site 6 other CURAs on the Social Economy. See <http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/hub/>
- **Coastal CURA Project** - has as partners 2 universities, 2 fishing organizations, four First Nations partners, and a regional organization. See: <http://www.coastalcura.ca/whoweare/index.html>

### **Selected Papers:**

- **Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador:** the Council is an independent organization promoting social and economic well-being. CUC is a partner in our SES/ÉSD network and their CEO, Penelope Rowe, is a Co-Director of the network. Their goal is a prosperous and inclusive society that supports individuals, families and communities. (site: <http://www.envision.ca/templates/aboutesc.asp?ID=61>)

Their publication on innovative strategies in government-community collaboration: *'Values Added CURA - What Have We Learned? The Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador: Strengthening Collaborative Approaches to Development'*, can be found here: [http://www.envision.ca/pdf/cura/CSC\\_Symposium\\_Backgrounder\\_May\\_6\\_2008.pdf](http://www.envision.ca/pdf/cura/CSC_Symposium_Backgrounder_May_6_2008.pdf)

- **Alliance de Recherche Universités – Communautés (ARUC):** Le programme des Alliances de recherche universités-communauté a été mis de l'avant en 1999 par le Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada. Celui-ci appuie la création d'alliances entre les universités et les communautés qui, grâce à un processus de collaboration continue et d'apprentissage mutuel, encouragent la recherche novatrice, la formation et la création de nouvelles connaissances dans des domaines importants pour le développement social, culturel ou économique des communautés canadiennes. (<http://www.aruc.rlt.ulaval.ca/>)

Leur Publication: *'Trajectoire D'évolution de Partenariat: Le Cas de la Papeterie Alma D'Abitibi-Consolidated Inc.'*, est ici:

[http://www.aruc.rlt.ulaval.ca/ARUC/Menu/Publications/annie\\_rousseau%20\\_DR-2007-001.pdf](http://www.aruc.rlt.ulaval.ca/ARUC/Menu/Publications/annie_rousseau%20_DR-2007-001.pdf)

- **Democratizing Knowledge: Research Experiments Based on University-Community Partnerships**, by Professor Yves Vaillancourt, Ph.D. This paper provides insight into the novel processes of partnership between university researchers, social activists and decision-makers of civil society as they partner to create and disseminate knowledge. It was prepared for the Carold Institute's Building a Local Global Democracy Project. Dr. Vaillancourt was an invited guest speaker at the Network's Year 2 Team Meeting in Moncton, NB, and has graciously shared his publication with us. [http://web.uvic.ca/ocbr/assets/pdfs/democratizing\\_knowledge.pdf](http://web.uvic.ca/ocbr/assets/pdfs/democratizing_knowledge.pdf)
- **Community-University Research Partnerships: Critical Reflections and an Alternative Experience** by Eric Shragge, in conjunction with Jill Hanley, Steve Jordan, Jaggi Singh, Martha Stiegman, and Aziz Choudry May 2006

[http://www.wallnetwork.ca/resources/Shragge\\_Partnerships\\_2006.pdf](http://www.wallnetwork.ca/resources/Shragge_Partnerships_2006.pdf)