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## *‘Where’s the Fisk in the Fiskebollen?’*

### Community–University Research Alliances – the Case of Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries and empowerment<sup>29</sup>

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#### **Introduction**

The complexity of many conditions and processes has led to the conclusion that something other than narrow and reductionist research practices are requisite in order to realise the sophisticated, holistic knowledge and understandings necessary for effective human action (Lawrence and Despres 2004, Max-Neef 2005). Documenting and understanding climate change is but one example of the challenges of complexity. Arguably, most matters concerning human socio-economic, cultural, political, and psychological-emotional conditions embody similar ‘complexity challenges’. Recognising the inability of single research disciplines and their particularistic and inductive modes of inquiry to meet these challenges, over

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29. The Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) Community–University Research Alliance (CURA) was supported from its inception in 1999 until December 2005 by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, CURA Program, grants (#s 833-99-1012 and 833-2002-2000), Fisheries and Oceans Canada Science and Technology Horizons Internships, and a few Fisheries and Oceans Canada Science Subvention research grants. SRSF is a partnership of Northeastern Nova Scotian Mi’kmaq, non-native marine harvester organisations, and university researchers. The work and experiences of this partnership have contributed significantly to the author’s understandings and perspectives. However, the description and analysis contained herein are attributable only to the author. All correspondence respecting this chapter should be directed to: anthony.davis@msvu.ca

the last thirty years or so a growing body of opinion and research mobilisation has championed the necessity for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research<sup>30</sup>.

Considerable debate continues to attend the precise meanings of these terms (Balsiger 2004, Lawrence and Despres 2004:400, Max-Neef 2005). Nonetheless, broad agreement exists on the necessity of engaging in research processes that begin with, at a minimum, the inclusion and integration of the widest range possible of pertinent research knowledge, practices and understandings (Horlick-Jones and Sime 2004, Klein 2004, Max-Need, *op.cit.*). For many, this includes the knowledge, practices, and understandings of the public, ranging from those of particular 'communities of interest', through politicians and policy makers, to the general public. These forms of knowledge, practice and understandings, while substantially different from those of the academic research disciplines, are argued to embody and express critical attributes that must be centrally situated within interdisciplinary and, especially, transdisciplinary practice (Max-Need, *op.cit.*). The advent of several recent research funding programs emphasises the importance of and expectations respecting multi-level and broadly inclusive interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research processes. This chapter discusses core approaches and key resulting experiences with respect to one Canadian research programme, as well as some of the challenges associated with such collaborations.

In February 1999 the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) launched the Community-University Research Alliances (CURAs) Program. From its inception the CURA initiative has been intended as a means of fostering and supporting 'action-oriented' and applied research, that is, research framed and mobilised for the purpose of intersecting with and impacting on 'real world' human situations and conditions<sup>31</sup>. The CURA Program encourages the formation of CURAs wherein the collaborating community organisations engage as full and equal partners. SSHRC justifies the CURA Program as an innovation necessary for mobilising university-based social sciences and humanities research know-how as a means of enabling 'communities of interest' to meet and address the challenges and impacts of a changing world. CURAs are also considered an effective means of mobilising, in the public interest, know-how that is assayed as largely isolated within the university 'ivory tower' and, by implication, in the possession of intellectual elites. The CURA approach is also judged as a means of accessing, engaging and integrating non-academic understandings in the creation of new knowledge and research practice.

30. See: a special issue of the journal *Futures* 2004; Max-Neef 2005; and Rapport 1997.

31. To date, the CURA Program has held three competitions, funded 52 CURAs, and has committed as much as \$52 million Cdn in support.

Of course, such programmes rest on several assumptions. They presume that university-based researchers and scholars are interested in working with 'communities of interest'. They also presume that 'communities of interest' discern some tangible advantage from working with university researchers and scholars. Finally, they assume that these parties are able to work together, and, through the collaboration, actually have something substantial to contribute to broader social understanding and well-being. The CURA Program and linked initiatives have been met with some criticism and resistance from Canadian university social scientists and humanists, as well as on the part of some 'communities of interest'. Some opine that initiatives such as CURA drain resources away from SSHRC's legislated mandate, which is to promote discipline-based research and to support individual scholars. Programmes such the CURAs redirect support to interdisciplinary team activities that, while leaving behind warm and fuzzy feelings, offer little promise for substantive contributions. Others despair of the CURAs' 'action' and 'applied' requirements, arguing that these must be at best unintended consequences of intellectual pursuits that need to be in their essence unfettered and uninfluenced by the expectations and politics of collaborations with non-academics and other interests. Still others insist that CURAs will require that the research scholarship coin be debased, thereby fundamentally compromising the strengths of discipline-based academic research and scholarship<sup>32</sup>.

This chapter addresses a variety of the substantial, challenging and concerning issues through my perspective on the story of one CURA – Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) (<http://faculty.msvu.ca/srsf>), and through my experiences as its Director. The tale told here reviews key qualities in SRSF's formation, dynamics and work. It relates the processes and successes; and it reviews the conflicts and crises. In short, the essay provides an opportunity to reflect upon the ways and means with which university-sited, discipline-based researchers and scholars can intersect meaningfully with 'communities of interest'.

Additionally, this chapter affords the opportunity to situate SRSF intentions and experiences with respect to broader issues, practices and potentials regarding current emphasis on and aspirations concerning interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research collaborations. These latter qualities of research collaboration currently receive considerable encouragement within Canada's research councils programmes.<sup>33</sup> The promise is that such collaborations will generate knowledge and understandings whose outcomes are much more than

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32. These opinions were expressed by many throughout recent SSHRC consultations with Canada's research and academic community linked with transforming SSHRC from a research council to a 'knowledge council' (cf. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada 2001, 2006; and Working Group on the Future of the Humanities 2001).

simply a sum of individual discipline perspectives and contributions. Community-university researcher collaborations offer another entry point and prospect for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary processes, assuming that community-based experiences, understandings, and approaches are appreciated and engaged as if analogous with a distinctive field of knowledge.

## A Reflection on Key Considerations

As a social anthropologist of a certain vintage, my personal formation within and relationship to the discipline of anthropology have been fundamental in shaping my sense of purpose as a social scientist and my conviction that a scholarly research discipline and practice are made meaningful through their contribution to enriching the human condition. Of course, my formation within anthropology has included a rich appreciation of the discipline's storied and troubled past, a past that includes data-raping peoples, conducting entirely destructive so-called 'modernisation' experiments, co-optation in the service of the imperial and the discipline's internecine struggles to exorcise the past's demons while rediscovering virtue. Anthropologists have been unquestionably implicated in compromising peoples' interests and capacities, while ostensibly working with the best intentions and the best interests of people in mind. By way of providing one Canadian example, between the late 1940s and mid 1970s anthropologists made a considerable contribution to aiding in the resettling of coastal Newfoundland and Labrador – closing 307 communities and relocating 4,168 households and 20,656 people – all in the service of modernisation (Brox 1972, Mathews 1976). As the prominent space given research ethics today attests, the discipline of anthropology strives mightily to distance itself from this past, while distilling the lessons learned and carrying them forward into new, more equitable and just research practices.

From the outset the process of developing community-university research alliances poses a difficult challenge. Perhaps the most important initial challenge is captured in response to the question: *What is it that discipline-based, university-sited research scholars have to contribute to, and that would be useful for, 'communities of interest'?* While many university researchers no doubt want to do good and to contribute meaningfully, such intentions, while necessary, are in themselves insufficient. In fact, research collaborations characterised in the main by such intentions run the risk of doing much harm.

In my experience, community organisations and their memberships are rarely interested in the theoretical-conceptual concerns and discourses of disci-

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33. This is made evident through the briefest of reviews of many programme descriptions ([www.sshrc.ca](http://www.sshrc.ca); [www.nserc.ca](http://www.nserc.ca); [www.cihr.ca](http://www.cihr.ca)).

pline-based academics. Moreover, few are willing to be positioned as subjects on whom social experiments and tests are played out. Additionally, many community organisations and their members are justifiably suspicious of research and researchers' motives. It is now widely recognised that *information is power*, and that surrendering information increases vulnerability to those in positions of social and economic determination, including governments. Many have direct personal experience with some sort of research; but rarely discern any personal benefit or consideration resulting from this experience. For some, research has become an important means whereby their disempowerment and vulnerabilities are deepened. Compounding this is the common perception that researchers, particularly university researchers, consider themselves as having superior intelligence and motives. Others, however, view university researchers as little more than a group of advantaged elites largely divorced and insulated from reality, who use language in a way intended to intimidate, to demean, and to limit access.

Yet, community organisations and their memberships also recognise that collaborating with university-sited researchers delivers sought-after and potentially valuable forms of legitimacy, status-credential benefits, and socially valued 'gravitas' that are otherwise generally unavailable. Such qualities are understood to buttress organisational and membership 'voice', particularly in public policy forums and settings where vested interests are expressed and negotiated. In short, finding ways to attract and work with university researchers, from the community organisation perspective, offers the promise of substantial benefits. From the organisational and membership perspective the challenge is to find and to engage with researchers in a manner that will reduce the risks and minimise discomfort, while maximising advantages. Why otherwise engage? Yet few researchers will simply lend their credentials for use in the interests of community organisations. Trade-offs are negotiated and definitively operational in these arrangements, even where the parties involved may be uncomfortable with or resistant to acknowledging that they have specific interests that are addressed within the relationship.

Other challenges characterise discipline-referenced researcher readiness and the capacity to engage with community collaborations. Here I am drawing an intentional distinction between discipline-based academic fields within the traditional social sciences and humanities, and professional studies disciplines that are often housed within universities, such as education, social work, business, law and the like. The latter have a particular practice and, in some cases, an expectation of enabling and engaging with 'applied' or 'practical' research, while the former are characterised by more discipline-centric ('disciplinary chauvinist' [Giri 2004]) scholarship values and practices. To begin with, discipline-referenced academic research is oriented ordinarily towards the study of questions

and issues posed with respect to theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Empirical sites, the subjects at which research is targeted, are chosen on the basis of their likely 'fit' respecting questions asked and answers sought. Such qualities are compelling and attractive to academic researchers. Yet tailoring these qualities within community organisation collaborations that may offer, at best, an imperfect research 'fit' is difficult, if not impossible. Attempting to do so may mortally compromise the capacity of the resulting research to address substantially the questions of interest. Moreover, the very prospect of investing the time and energy required to negotiate workable conditions in such circumstances is, for many, simply unappealing.

In addition to the 'fit' issue, the academic career reward system in much of Europe and North America has yet to value substantially the most likely categories of research outputs to be generated through discipline-referenced research-community collaborations. Tenure and promotion are achieved largely with respect to the quantity and quality of research publications within peer-reviewed journals and academic presses. The so-called 'grey literature' outputs such as research reports, fact sheets and research communications in popular media are valued, at best, as lightweight contributions that will do little, if anything, to establish scholarly reputations and to generate academically sophisticated knowledge. Yet these are the very sorts of research outputs most likely to be produced, at least through the initial years, from collaborations such as CURAs. Certainly the career interests of junior-rank and untenured researchers are not likely to be well served through participation in CURA-like initiatives. Commentary in the initial performance evaluation report of SSHRC's CURA Program supports these observations. At the end of the very first bullet within the report's summary and conclusion, the author remarks: '... some early contributions have been made. However, a fairly high proportion of CURAs (about one-third) have not yet yielded significant peer-reviewed research publications' (Kishchuk 2003:21).

In this respect, it is telling to note that these attributes also underscore core motivations driving discipline-referenced university research. While theoretically-framed curiosity guides intellectual pursuits and research activity, likewise career considerations, academic advancement valuation practices, and academic reputation/status dynamics shape choices. In fact, these attributes of the academic researcher's 'real world' are centrally at play in any and all choices respecting research practices and collaborations. The discipline-referenced academic 'Mother Teresas' are rare beasts, at least until they become tenured, full professors with little need to reference their research careers with respect to the standard and pervasive valuation and status practices.



In short, both community organisations and academic researchers, while probably sharing general intentions and concerns, are more than likely to bring substantial contrasting and conflicting needs, goals and orientations to the collaborative process and dynamics. The answers to the query *'Where's the Fisk in the Fiskebollen?'* in academic scholar-community research partnerships will embody necessarily and unavoidably quite different reference points, conditions and interests. In my view, directness in and success at taking on this issue right from the outset will determine much of a research partnership's likelihood of achieving substance and success. Moreover, these outcomes are contingent on clearly identifying and operationalising what each partner is prepared to bring to the table. From an academic research perspective, university researchers bring knowledge about how to design and conduct research, how to analyse and write up data, and approaches to adopt communicating research outcomes – in brief, knowledge generation and knowledge communication. Community organisation partners are best positioned to know the key issues that confront their memberships and communities, issues that might benefit from rigorously designed and conducted research. Much of SRSF's early story concerns identifying these issues and working up the processes necessary to address them.

## SRSF's Genesis

By 1998 the Atlantic Canadian moratorium on fishing the great northern cod and the closure or down-sizing of other fisheries had stripped thousands of the basis for their livelihoods, reshaped coastal community inter- and intra-family dynamics, and fuelled a massive out-migration of young men and women. Recovery remains a distant hope. Of course, the present crisis is but the latest catastrophic event in a sequence of resource and economic crises that have swept through Atlantic Canada's fisheries over the last fifty years or so. Many communities' remaining small boat fleets are now able to work only for three or four months in one or two limited-entry and highly regulated fisheries. Once the cornerstone in coastal community life and livelihood, small boat fisheries have been transformed from full-time, multi-species-based livelihoods into part-time, specialised activities dependent for their well-being on the abundance of one or two marine resources. In Atlantic Canada that resource is the American lobster.

Understandably, this set of conditions has created a pervasive sense of disruption, vulnerability and uncertainty among many small boat fishing families and communities. To cap all of this off, the Canada's federal regulatory agency, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), also instituted dramatically increased license renewal fees, particularly in the lobster fishery. This accumu-

lation of demands and pressures has played off of the fact that many small boat harvesters' associations do not have the capacity to represent their members' interests effectively and have little or no political leverage. Consequently, many have been left feeling entirely powerless and victimised. Even the most rosy-eyed optimist would be forgiven for concluding that not much, given the recent developments, offers promise for the future of community-based, small boat fisheries.

This is the broad outline of the situation into which has been thrust the September 1999 Supreme Court of Canada's 'Marshall' decision. The 'Marshall' decision affirmed that the Mi'kmaq had a treaty right to participate in commercial fisheries for the purpose of realising a 'moderate livelihood'. Consequently, the region's commercial fisheries are now required to somehow accommodate the Mi'kmaq as largely new entrants in an environment that is under extreme pressure due to single-species dependency, social upheaval, and pervasive feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness. For the Mi'kmaq, a First Nation that has been dispossessed from access to primary resource-based livelihoods including fisheries, the Marshall decision represents a key piece in developing the economic foundations essential to realising successful self-governance, to improving social and economic conditions within families and communities, and to further revitalising culture, identity and language.

These attributes provide the broad social and political context within which the community-university alliance – Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) – was launched. The SRSF alliance arose to address several Mi'kmaq and non-native fisheries organisations' stated needs for developing greater research literacy and capacity through the formation of linkages with university-seated expertise. SRSF partners the Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association (GNSBFA), the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (GCIFA) and the Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society (PFWS) with an interdisciplinary group of university researchers.

The SRSF collaboration took shape prior to the 'Marshall decision', but was launched in January 2000, upon winning three years of SSHRC-CURA funding. As an alliance, SRSF was governed by a Steering Committee composed of partner organisation and social research representatives. Agendas, work-plans, timetables and tasks were identified and agreed to through a consensus decision-making process. One of the first substantial outcomes of this process was the development of a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU). All SRSF partners were required to sign this document. The MOU details SRSF's goals, governance processes, and the broad outline of partner commitments to one another as well as to SRSF, particularly respecting the perceived need to affirm operating principles such as transparency, inclusivity, and accountability.



Drafting a *Researcher Protocol* was another early focus and achievement. The SRSF alliance judged it essential that all research affiliated with it be conducted in a manner that assures adherence to ethical procedures and the principles of transparency and accountability. SRSF partners also judged it critical for all researchers supported through and engaged in the alliance's projects to understand their obligations and responsibilities, particularly the need to share all information gathered, to report results in a timely fashion, and to include the SRSF alliance partners in previews of data analyses and presentations of findings before public release and dissemination. The prerogative claim to preview was understood and exercised as a relationship consideration, and was not engaged to censure or otherwise compromise research and intellectual freedoms.

Another significant early achievement was the design and launch of the SRSF website (<http://faculty.msvu.ca/srsf>). The alliance demonstrated its commitment 'in practice' to its central operating principles by employing the project website as a means through which all SRSF documents are archived and made publicly accessible. As developed, the SRSF website contains copies of documents ranging from Steering Committee minutes, through workshop materials, to research instruments, reports, and publications. The website list-serv was established for the purpose of providing a dynamic means through which SRSF's geographically dispersed partners could maintain mutual contact and engagement.

The Alliance, from its outset, recognised that a serious-minded commitment to capacity building required that SRSF resources be invested directly and substantially in organisational infrastructure, human resources and student internships. To these ends, SRSF throughout its SSHRC-CURA-funded lifespan paid four-fifths of each of the core organisations' Community Research Coordinators' annual salary and employer contributions, covered the full salary of all student interns, and paid for essential equipment. All research activities were operationalized through a team approach, with each organisation's team also participating in the other's research design and data-gathering activities. SRSF's remaining resources were employed to support these research activities, with organisational and university staff completing all phases of data gathering and participating in all aspects of initial data analyses and write-ups.

## **SRSF – Form, Focus, and Substance**

SRSF's central purpose has been to build community-university capacity and linkages through interdisciplinary research workshops and social research projects. The workshops enabled university researchers drawn from a variety of

disciplines and traditions to engage community organisation staff and student interns in a review of specific 'real world' research design and methodological attributes and issues. The emphasis, from the outset, was on asking researchers to employ 'Plain English' and forthrightness in explaining attributes of research designs and methodologies, as well as in relating the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to conducting social research and in discussing their own experiences in terms of what worked and what did not work.

SRSF employed workshop-based learning as a key means of building community organisation staff and student intern research literacy and know-how. The community organisation partners defined research issues in consultation as a 'bottom-up' process. These issues were then discussed and refined within SRSF workshops, several of which invited the participation of researchers from throughout Atlantic Canadian universities. Once the specific research issues were refined, attention focused on developing appropriate research designs, tools, and methodologies. This aspect of our process engaged all SRSF collaborators in a series of working seminars focused on building an understanding of the various attributes of and needs for credible and defensible social research.

By consensus, documenting the local ecological knowledge of the Mi'kmaq and small-boat fishermen became SRSF's initial focus for primary research. Various attributes of local understandings of lobster grounds, reproduction and recruitment were the focus of research with the non-native fisheries organisations. With the Mi'kmaq, relations with and knowledge about American Eel (*K'at*, pronounced *ka:taq*) were identified as the priority. While the research projects addressed specific issues as identified by each SRSF partner organisation, all of the partners participated in the work of designing the research, developing the research methodologies, and, where appropriate, participating in the research. This approach and the associated experiences fostered inter-partner working relations and engagements, creating a 'learning circle' of sorts to which all contributed and within which all learned.

During SRSF's first year, most of the research effort was focused on developing detailed background documents that reviewed key attributes of the social, economic and political contexts within which the primary social research was to be seated. For instance, both of the fisheries organisations gathered information from both government and published sources concerning core historical and present-day characteristics of their areas' fisheries. The data bases developed with this information provide a detailed and exhaustive review of characteristics, through time, of factors such as numbers fishing, licenses held, vessel attributes such as numbers, ages, and sizes, and landed weights and landed values by species, sector and gear types. This information was developed

into detailed background documents profiling historical trends and current conditions. The background materials are understood as 'living documents' in that new information is incorporated on an ongoing basis. Additionally, these documents were developed with the understanding that they provide essential background and context that are critical to informing the focus, design and conduct of primary social research. As the SRSF partnership developed and research priorities were drawn into clear focus, several key messages came to assume a critical place throughout most dialogues. These are:

- *'The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions'*. In this message the partnership acknowledged that the desire to do 'good work', while necessary, was insufficient. Demonstrated clarity of focus, commitment to engagement, and timeliness in task completion all became understood as essential to goals, intended outcomes, and achievements.
- *'Garbage In ... Garbage Out'*. In this message the partnership expressed its understanding that the usefulness of social research is dependent entirely upon the thought and care invested in research design and the commitment given to the conduct and completion of research undertaken. All partners came to understand and, more importantly, to engage in social research from a perspective that fully appreciated the requirement for rigour in research design and conduct.
- *'Useful Research is Rarely, if Ever, an Act of Confirmation'*. In this message SRSF acknowledged that community organisation and university faculty research priorities most frequently arise from areas such as researcher interests, membership needs and beliefs, and representational issues where it is anticipated that research will provide support for contentions and confirm beliefs. While it recognised that at some level all research is potentially a political activity, the Alliance came to understand that a commitment to well-designed research will generate outcomes that, while unlikely to provide simple black/white solutions, will contribute to understanding, withstand the rigours of public inspection, and provide useful, confidence-building information.
- *'Strong Partnerships Foster Independent Capacity and Mutual Responsibility, Not Dependency Relations'*. In this message the Partnership was affirming its commitment to build research capacity and know-how in a manner that would foster 'equal but different' operative attributes in relations between university researchers and community organisation partners. The objective differences and potential conflicts between university-based researcher and community organisation 'interests' were also acknowledged upfront in this message. Further, the Partnership worked

with the explicit intention of building research capacity and relations that would assure organisational independence and, thereafter, equity in community organisation – university researcher relations.

Various iterations of these four messages were developed early in the SRSF partnership and repeated in a mantra-like fashion throughout the collaboration. To a large extent, they captured and represented the Alliance's spirit, while also providing continual reminders of the partnership's commitments, purpose and precautions.

These messages proved particularly useful as reference points when SRSF delved into specific research projects and research goals. In the end, the projects employed a variety of research designs and methodologies, all of which were arrived at through what came to be characterised as a 'results-rich research process' (cf. Figure 1).

Phase I & II	Phase III
Collaborative definition of research issues	Develop interview schedule and consent forms for detailed interviews with local experts recommended by their peers and communities
Collaborative development of research design and methodology	
Compile background data, develop research protocols and ethics approval, develop and test survey	Complete and transcribe interviews as Phase III proceeds
Inform participants through a mail-out about the planned research	All data and research results are catalogued and securely archived, with partners and that all confidentiality provisions satisfied
The project teams complete interviews. Phase I&II research is administered by the partner CRC and St.FX researchers.	Community meetings - research results and policy implications
Develop data file and enter information as the interviews are completed	Develop research communications - community newspapers, industry publications and SRSF fact sheets
Complete analysis and distribute Phase I & II research reports	
Community meetings - research results and their implications, dialogue - development and focus of Phase III	Develop and present academic research papers and monographs
Develop and present academic research papers and monographs	

*Figure 1 A Results-Rich Research Process.*

## Lessons from the SRSF Experience

SRSF's strength, substance, and successes reside in its specific focus on developing social research capacity and literacy that draw on best practices in academic social sciences and the practical knowledge and understandings of the community partners, as well as in the focus on conducting research projects that arose from partner priorities. The emphasis on learning and doing through collaboration built positive, outcomes-oriented learning experiences among the partners. Partner collaboration in data analyses, writing, conference presentations and other communication activities also enriched the learning and capacity of the academic researchers. For instance, most university and community organisation staff and several students participated in regional, national and international conference presentations, developing valuable experiences in what had been extremely foreign settings. All of these formed the basis for achieving SRSF's core capacity-building and research-informed 'voice' goals, as well as contributing to the building of substantial relations between the small boat fishing organisations and Mi'kmaq participants. SRSF's partners have come to know and to trust one another through this process. If nothing else, the SRSF process demonstrated that Mi'kmaq and coastal peoples can work together with tremendous effect when provided with the proper means and with issues that reveal shared concerns and needs. Additionally, SRSF's work, through the act of treating peoples' experiences and concerns seriously and with respect, affirmed for many that their experiences and observations are valuable, meaningful, and deserving of respect and consideration. This has been one of SRSF's most important outcomes, at a fundamental human level, as it influences how people think about and value their histories, places, experiences and concerns.

As might be imagined, the SRSF CURA process and relations experienced several difficulties and a couple of crises, one of which resulted in a major partnership re-arrangement. Nonetheless, essential lessons were drawn by the CURA from these experiences. The most direct lesson concerned SRSF's on-the-ground organisation and management. Early in the CURA's development it became apparent that a full-time dedicated research coordinator was required in order to assure that the project stayed on track and achieved its targets in a timely fashion. The early challenges also underscored the fact that community organisations have and pursue priorities that are not necessarily shared with university researchers. Community organisations are in their heart advocacy organisations championing the interests of their memberships, often in a political and decision-making context that is contentious. University, discipline-centric research traditions and practices do not mesh easily with community organisation advocacy and representational interests, particularly as they are oriented to advance their own interests. For instance, the



time, energy and resources associated with the design, conduct and preparation of defensible research may be poorly understood by community organisations and, as a consequence, test their patience. The Academic Researchers caution often associated with data interpretation, data ambiguities, and difficulties in simply discovering clear support in research outcomes for contentions and preferences may also result in frustrations, disappointments and conflicts. Nonetheless, developing substantial and sustainable research capacity and literacy requires a community-university partnership process that avoids short-cuts and either hasty or overly selective interpretations, while fostering confidence in the information and insight advantages to be gained from well-designed, thorough research practices. Notably, these practices were also informed by the community partner understandings and knowledge, particularly in areas such as ways and means for involving community members in the research, the sorts of questions to ask and wordings to use, and how to communicate research results effectively.

Additionally, a commitment to participation in research processes within consensually defined timelines is also a critical part of the working process of a successful and mutually engaged CURAs partnership. All partners must make and satisfy, within reason, commitments for research engagements and outcomes. Failures to do so by one or more partners are highly corrosive of partnership confidence, mutuality and inter-personal dynamics. This quality impacted upon SRSF partnership dynamics during its initial year, and was sorted out during the CURA's realignment. This experience also highlighted the need for a CURA governance process that enables difficult decisions, and the wisdom of including such decision-making processes within the partnership *Memorandum of Understanding*. Additionally, this experience underscored the requirement for leadership that keeps the partnership focused on CURA goals and commitments.

University-sited, discipline-centric researchers and scholars also cart considerable baggage into the matrix of partnership-focused and -driven research. The necessary sequence of work activities and research outcome products, that is, aside from being associated with a large, competitively won, external research award, may offer younger researchers little by way of career incentives and benefits. Academic advancement is contingent to a large degree on evidence of research productivity, particularly expressed through publication in academic research and scholarly journals. The development trajectories and initial foci of many CURA undertakings are unlikely to enable much by way of meaningful early academic research productivity, a point that was remarked upon within the initial CURA Program performance report (Kishchuk 2003). In the SRSF experience, such a focus would have been inappropriate, and likely destructive.



For many university scholars, team approaches and dynamics are foreign to their traditional discipline-based training, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, where individual scholars focusing all their attention on curiosity-driven, theoretically and conceptually interesting questions. Status merit and career advancement accrue to those who contribute, through academic scholarly publication, to discipline-based understandings. This is difficult, although not impossible, to reconcile with CURA-like settings where a very different focus and process must determine research foci and priorities. SRSF followed a practice of inviting researchers from the host and other universities to workshops, and of communicating SRSF news, activities and outcomes to those who had attended workshops or otherwise indicated an interest in the CURA and its work. Invitations to engage further were repeated continuously and embedded in every communication package. One of these communications went as far as to describe the attributes of the secondary data inventoried within the partner organisations, and invited researchers to engage with the partners independent of any SRSF connection. Nonetheless, not one university researcher, other than the original proponents, initiated any sort of mature, sustained research relations with either SRSF or any of its community partners, or took up opportunities to broaden the interdisciplinary work. This was quite disappointing.

SRSF's orientation to build stand-alone capacity within its community partners was interpreted to mean that at some point the organisations' leadership and membership would need to decide whether the research capacity built was valued sufficiently to warrant priority support. This has been achieved in a half-measure manner, mainly through the appointments of the Community Research Coordinators to management positions. It remains to be seen whether these organisations' research know-how and capacity will be further developed and expressed. In my view, publicly funded research councils should not be expected to provide continuous funding for community organisation research capacity.

As currently cast, the so-called traditional discipline-centric social sciences offer two main research-related potentials for advocacy-dedicated community organisations. The first of these are essentially the technical requirements for designing and conducting research and for interpreting research data that will produce defensible and representational findings. The second potentially useful contribution concerns presenting organisations with alternative and, hopefully, new ways of examining and understanding research-based information, as well as with insights concerning the relation and vested interests of organisations and their memberships to research-generated information. To some extent, this may involve developing clear and accessible ways and means of communicating research outcomes, although university academic research-

ers are not necessarily the first group that comes to mind when thinking about clear and accessible communication skills.

For researchers open to the experience, working with community organisations offers wonderful opportunities to learn about new and alternative ways of approaching and understanding human conditions and issues, as well as compelling critical questions concerning the social purposes of academic research and scholarship. But, in my view, university researchers are poorly positioned to be champions of specific community organisation interests, if simply because they are not at risk of suffering much by way of personal consequences arising from misinterpretations or bad advice. Furthermore, having contributed to building community organisations' research know-how and literacy, I think it critical that organisations be positioned and encouraged to employ this capacity in a fully independent manner. After all, one research partnership core goal is to foster organisational and membership capacity and 'voice' empowerment, a goal that is best realised through fostering independence from university-based researchers and full capacity for independent action.

As a final note, SRSF's interdisciplinary strengths and successes were rooted in and expressed through the university researcher-community organisation collaborations. This was certainly not the case respecting the engagement of and relations between discipline-centric academic researchers. Little, if any, substantial forward movement was achieved in transcending discipline-referenced boundaries and preferences. I suspect that one means through which interdisciplinary strengths may have been accessed and mobilised was through a process that identified this as a critical initial start-up goal. Actual interdisciplinarity, as contrasted with its 'as presented on paper' relative, requires considerable open-mindedness, good faith, and effort investments on the part of all participants from the very beginning, meaning in the early formative stages of the research collaboration. Indeed, forming and working with rich interdisciplinarity, if not transdisciplinarity, must be a key collaborative goal from the outset. The SRSF-affiliated research academics neither recognised nor substantially achieved such an outcome.