Small Places as Consumers of Research: Constraints and Opportunities to Building Capacity

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Community-University Partnerships
‘The Challenge’

- Rural and small town places face many changes
- Seek information to make the best decision
  - Need timely, relevant, and useful information
- Academics enter research task seeking to improve questions
- Mismatch of expectations
  - Communities want answers
  - Academics want questions
Constraints to KM - I

- Small municipal offices – few staff
  - Experience
  - Turnover and institutional memory
  - Limited local technical support and resources

- Getting mutual commitment

- Partnering demands
  - Difficult on time / staff
  - Often need financial commitment
Constraints to KM - II

- Bottom-up ‘may not be equipped’ to mobilize knowledge
- Need support for building relationships / capacity
  - Poorly understood by funding programs
  - Academic and funding institutions talk ‘engaged language’ but not equipped to follow through with infrastructure / support
Developing Opportunities

- Relationship development
  - Who to talk to / know who to call
  - Routine interaction (become the ‘go-to’ focal point)
  - Developing trust
- Residents contact us with significant concerns / events in the community
  - Researchers privy to emerging issues
  - Improved ability to respond timely to needs
Research “Product Cycle” for Consumers

- **Design**
  - What do we really need to know?

- **Execution**
  - Building local skills so they can do it next time

- **Implementation**
  - Communication
  - Follow through
Communities as Consumers of Research

- Involvement in project design:
  - Ensures fit with partnership goals
  - Improves understanding of questions and how results can be used
Communities as Consumers of Research

- Involvement in **execution:**
  - Provides labour and builds capacity (data collection, writing, promoting results)
  - Tumbler Ridge Seniors’ Needs Project
Communities as Consumers of Research

- Involvement in **implementation:**
  - Communicating research
    - Update letters, newspaper articles, radio interviews, posters, copies of research products, websites, community forums, council presentations.
    - Posting solely on a university website does not work!
Communities as Consumers of Research

Implementation continued:

- Build momentum to initiate change
  - Linking communities with similar issues (i.e. rural transportation)
  - Promoting best practices
- Respect, patience, flexibility, AND follow-up!
- Planning sessions to bridge results and next steps
  - Short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions
- Success breeds success
Partnership Issues

- It’s a people process
- “Getting to know you” protocols
- Relationship development
- Listening / sharing
- Capacity building
- Mutual commitment
Developing Community Capacity to be Consumers of Research

- Develop relationships / trust
- Understand the research process / results
- Communication
- Planning and follow-up

Knowledge mobilization will improve once appropriate time / resources / roles are allocated to people and processes