

Community-Based Research Canada **Context Backgrounder**

In April 2019 at the Community Based Research Canada (CBR Canada) annual meeting, board members identified the need for a renewed strategic plan that reflects changes in the CBR landscape across Canada and beyond since the last plan was drafted in 2014. Since this time CBR Canada was incorporated into a legal non-profit organization, and the organizing leadership (The Secretariat) has moved from the University of Victoria to the Centre for Community-Based Research (CCBR) in Waterloo. In parallel, other entities have taken shape in support of the broader push for community engagement between communities and campus (e.g. Community Campus Engage Canada, Ashoka Canada, McConnell Family Foundation, Carnegie Classification), and the funding landscape continues to advance a strong eco-system for community-driven research in Canada. CBR Canada has grown in both membership and in enhancing programs including a new [CBR Canada website](#), regular webinars, active presence on social media, newsletters and capacity building workshops, development of the [Community-Based Research Excellence Tool](#) (CBRET), and has an active Board involved in subcommittee work. The CBRET was developed as a result of the 2014 SSHRC-funded National Summit on community-based research indicators of excellence, and has been widely adopted as a tool to evaluate the quality and impact of community-based research proposals and projects.

In May 2020, CBR Canada will co-host its eighth C2UExpo (Community-Campus-Exposition), a bi-annual international conference providing leadership and space for both academics and communities to engage in showcasing community-campus partnerships that address local and global societal problems. The 2020 conference, themed *Culture, Place, and Resilience*, will be hosted by the NORDIK Institute, Algoma University and Shingwauk Kinooomaage Gamig in Baawating, otherwise known as Sault Ste. Marie, in Northern Ontario. C2UExpo has gained national and international recognition as a venue for showcasing a wide range of work by scholars, practitioners and community members that demonstrates the capacity of community-based research to address pressing societal issues.

As part of our efforts to develop a Strategic Plan, we have prepared this document to help situate CBR Canada within the rapidly shifting national/global landscape of community-based research and to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities for our work moving forward.

Canadian Context

There is a clear link between community-based research and the ability and capacity to address societal challenges. Increasingly, organizations and institutions are recognizing the urgent need for community-driven and locally contextualized research that is relevant and timely. There is a trend towards greater recognition of and interest in community-based research, and increased community-university research funding opportunities directed to enhanced societal impact. The report “*Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities*”, commissioned by Simon Fraser University (SFU) and the JW McConnell Family Foundation in 2017, identifies five sets of instruments that post-secondary institutions can leverage to foster community and societal well-being – *financial, physical, relational, education, and research*. Higher education institutions across the country are embracing these ideas and looking for ways to increase their social impact by embedding these concepts deeper into their strategic plans and institutions. The report points to ‘*a continuum of practices from those institutions who are just starting out, to those who have embedded community engagement in teaching and research, to those who have made community engagement a strategic pillar in the institutional plan, to those who have integrated it across the institution and everything it does*’. At this end of the spectrum, it goes beyond a single strategic pillar and becomes infused in the organization’s culture and purpose. A survey published by Universities Canada in 2019 affirms this growing commitment of Canadian universities. Key findings show that Canadian universities are deeply committed to their local impact with ninety-two percent (92%) of respondents indicating that social impact is explicitly referenced in their institutions mission, vision and/or values and also in their strategic plan. In addition, over half of the respondents (52%) have a specific plan focused on maximising the university’s impact in the local community, while 78% have identified social impact as one of the top five priorities for their university. Another pan-Canadian organization, Ashoka Canada, is also developing a strategic approach to support community engaged research among its network of Ashoka Fellows and partner post-secondary institutions in Canada. Both the McConnell Family Foundation and Ashoka Canada will join CBR Canada on a panel at C2UExpo 2020 to discuss the Canadian landscape and to determine a collective approach to advance the common good for all Canadians.

Nationally, there have been other drivers advancing community-based research. In 2017, the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) was created to improve the coordination efforts of Canada’s research funding agencies: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). SSHRC’s flagship ‘Connections and Partnership Grants’ have been incredibly successful in bridging capacity and knowledge exchange between campus and community across the social sciences and humanities for almost two decades. CIHR has also been a leader in supporting community-driven and patient oriented research in the health field and NSERC has a number of programs that call for more collaborative partnerships in science. The CRCC and other philanthropic foundations, such as the Vancouver Foundation, Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Canadian Housing Corporation, are now requiring community-driven, participatory research in several

of their granting programs. Considerations of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) have become standard practice and in most cases a requirement in policy development across post-secondary and public institutions, civil society and corporate sectors. Higher education institutions now require all funding proposals and projects to include consideration of EDI. This is ever more important in addressing local challenges faced by newcomers - immigrants, refugees and international students, Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities, and members of the LGBTQ2S communities.

In November 2019, Canada's Tri-Council funding agencies signed the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), joining several other leaders around the world who are working to strengthen research excellence by ensuring equitable and impactful measures of research assessment. DORA is a global initiative that is supporting the development and promotion of best practice in assessment of scholarly research. There is now strong recognition that the quality and impact of research cannot be measured through journal publications alone, and that research outcomes are multifaceted reflecting multiple types of knowledge and ways of knowing that must be assessed on their own merit. Recognizing the value and societal impact of research, beyond the journal article, will have profound implications for how research is funded and the way in which researchers are assessed. An example in Canada is the [Research Quality Plus \(RQ+\)](#) tool developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to assess applied and translational research. From an international development perspective, the quality and value of research is directly linked to its relevance and translation to practical applications. There are several other examples of research assessment methods emerging around the world that will transform the way research is evaluated, moving beyond traditional publications to a more holistic broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice. This is good news for community-based research in Canada and globally, in helping to strengthen research assessment (i.e. funding/fellowships, hiring & promotion, awards) that value and emphasise the impact of the research itself and not where it is published. CBR Canada is well positioned to advocate for and demonstrate the value, impact and applicability of community-based research to address a wide range of societal issues.

Generally, there is an increased interest and recognition in the value of creating meaningful research partnerships. The emergence and expansion of community-university engagement offices and knowledge mobilization units in universities across the country evidence this. Despite these enabling structures to support partnerships and meaningful engagement, issues remain with community access to funds as well as disparities in power and capacity. During the Harper administration (2006-2015), funding to support capacity bridging and partnership development between Indigenous organizations and researchers was cut significantly, reducing the capacity of Indigenous partners to engage and magnifying power imbalances in research partnerships over time. The playing field remains uneven, and the reality on the ground does not reflect the commitments being made in most strategic plans and funding programs. There is a need to shift the focus of research to the strengths, resilience and wise practices within Indigenous communities. This requires that research models respond to both local and regional community needs and priorities. Building capacity and developing sustainable research models in communities contributes to research that is respectful, meaningful and transformative for Indigenous

communities. This shift requires that Indigenous communities are centrally involved in all aspects of the research process, including being eligible to hold and administer funding. These intentions are supported by the Canada Research Coordinating Committee recently released report *Setting New Directions to Support Indigenous Research and Research Training in Canada 2019-2022*. The 4 pillars of the strategic plan include 1) Building relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples; 2) Supporting research priorities of Indigenous Peoples; 3) Creating greater funding accessibility to granting agency programs, and 4) Championing Indigenous leadership, self-determination and capacity building in research. CBR Canada is well positioned to contribute to these strategic directions.

The decolonization of institutions is an important movement across the country, and has been propelled by the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report in 2015. Decolonization can be broadly understood as an umbrella term for ‘diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonisation and racialization, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being and relating that these processes seek to eradicate’. Recent writings by Indigenous scholars on the topic argue for ‘an indigenization that provokes a foundational, intellectual, and structural shift in the academy, requiring the overhaul of academic norms to better reflect a more meaningful relationship with Indigenous nations’¹. The TRC has been foundational in calling all sectors, including education, into action and placing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples at the forefront. Federally, the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) reaffirmed the agencies’ commitment to responding to the TRC, specifically to “action 65”, which calls to grow the capacity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to lead their own research and partner with the broader research community. This work included extensive engagement across the country in 2018-19 and will help launch a national indigenous research framework to strengthen indigenous-led research in Canada. Alongside these national shifts, several First Nations, Metis and Inuit have developed their own research protocols and strategies to partner with external institutions and organizations (i.e. Inuit Research Strategy).

Other initiatives that are expanding the CBR space nationally include the Canadian Pilot Cohort (CPC), a group of sixteen Canadian post-secondary institutions that have agreed to undertake the Carnegie Classification – a framework for classifying colleges and universities in the US - to reflect on its fit in Canadian community engagement contexts. From 2019-2020, the CPC is working to identify adjustments to the existing Classification, recommend solutions and contribute to the development of a Canadian version of the Classification, if desirable. Although a pilot, this Canadian-wide initiative signals the strong will and commitment of institutions to support high-quality community engagement that is deeply-rooted in their work.

¹ Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: <https://www.ualberta.ca/-/media/3CB5BB4AAA7F4A6F92DFCF0B9E273837>

International Context

Globally, we are seeing similar shifts in the advancement and uptake of community-based research and the role of universities in addressing local/global challenges. A recent report published by the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)² points a spotlight on the critical role of higher education in the 2030 Agenda, and calls for a commitment and responsibility towards collective action. *“At GUNi we firmly believe that (1) awareness raising, (2) more and stronger partnerships, (3) lobbying for an improved policy environment and (4) support for transdisciplinary work at HEIs, and also between HEIs and other institutions and organizations, will be of key importance in the quest towards implementing the goals set for 2030.”* GUNi, and several other international networks (i.e. UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research, International Association of Universities, Talloires) are calling for a *knowledge democracy* - an appreciation for an ecology of knowledges – and an epistemological revolution and dramatic shift in our understanding of who creates knowledge, how knowledge emerges, whose knowledge counts, and the role of co-creation of knowledge between communities and academia. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015-30) in particular are providing an important global framework calling on all sectors to collaborate towards a sustainable and equitable future. *“Education is a key piece of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and calls for a rethinking of education and knowledge as global common goods. To enhance and sustain the dignity and capacity of the human person in relation to others and to nature”*.

Initiatives such as the UNESCO Chair in Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education [Knowledge 4 Change \(K4C\) Global Consortium](#) is advancing the capacity of academic and community researchers, with a specific focus in the global South and excluded North. Thirteen local training hubs have now been created under the K4C Consortium to design and conduct educational programs for the co-creation of knowledge through collective action by practitioners, community-based researchers, community groups and academics. The hubs focus on the development of local courses on the co-construction of knowledge and its application to the solution of community issues linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The [Salish Sea Hub](#), one of two Canadian hubs located in Coast Salish Territories, is a partnership between the University of Victoria, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and the Victoria Foundation created in 2019 that will provide CBR training for students and community organizations with a focus on Indigenous worldview, gender equality and climate action.

Global Climate Strikes around the world are being led by young leaders like Greta Thunberg (Sweden), Autumn Peltier (Canada), Helena Gualinga (Ecuadorian Amazon), née Yinka Lawanson (Nigeria) and others calling attention to the urgency of the climate crisis and demanding bold action. Climate Change, described often as a ‘wicked problem’, shares an interconnectedness with other systems or social injustices. Examples are poverty, homelessness, access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation – all of these issues

² GUNi publication [‘Implementing the 2030 Agenda at Higher Education Institutions: Challenges and Responses’](#)

are interconnected in nature and difficult (*or impossible*) to solve. Tackling wicked problems – such as climate change - requires active participation of affected communities in the process and the deployment of multidisciplinary methods in a people-oriented, systemic approach to effecting measurable and meaningful change. CBR Canada, and its member institutions and organizations, can play an important role in leading dialogue and action on these global issues.

Our world is divided along many fault lines including environmental, social and economic divides. We live in a time where social exclusion is on the rise. Women and persons who identify as LGBTQ2S, in particular, continue to face significant systemic barriers across sectors and the rates of gender-based violence in our society are alarming. The burdens of climate change are disproportionately felt by the poor, the disempowered, the marginalized, and by Indigenous Peoples. According to a 2018 BBC Ipsos global survey, 76% of people, across twenty-seven countries, believe that their country is divided (62% of Canadians have the same opinion). Identity, territoriality, religion, race, economic status, culture and politics have all been cited as root causes of increased divisions. We need, now more than ever, an ethic of respect for diversity such that every person in society feels they are valued and belong. Building such pluralistic societies requires that systemic inequalities and exclusions in all domains be addressed.

CBR Canada – advocating for a locally contextualized approach to knowledge co-creation – responds to such challenges by building capacity and bridging knowledge with an emphasis on building trust, reconciliation, and equality for all.

Implications for CBR Canada

CBR Canada will continue advocating for an enabling policy and funding landscape that will help strengthen community-based research. We are well positioned, with active board members and a growing membership across the country, to help bridge knowledge and capacity between community and academic researchers in pursuit of societal goals. In developing a new strategic framework, we hope to engage a diverse audience of academic, community and other influencers (i.e. funding agencies, policy-makers, philanthropic sector) to help build a road map that is inclusive and impactful for all Canadians. Through this exercise we hope to be better informed of and inspired by the different ways CBR Canada might play a role in addressing pressing societal challenges.