

NRE² BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Knowledge Mobilization: A View from the Front Lines

Tom Beckley
David Bruce
Omer Chouinard
Ivan Emke
Greg Halseth
Bruno Jean
Patrice LeBlanc
Dianne Looker

Bill.Reimer@concordia.ca
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<http://nre.concordia.ca>

Diane Martz
Solange Nadeau
John Parkins
Steve Plante
Doug Ramsey
Richard Stedman
Ellen Wall
Derek Wilkinson
Anna Woodrow



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- This presentation will be posted on the NRE website

- Thanks
- Asked to consider how KM works in Practice:
 - Differences between the paper and the practice
- Not sure what I can add
 - Have heard most of the challenges we have faced
 - With some innovative responses
- Therefore treat this as story exchange
 - Plus invitation for future dialogue
 - Plus some suggestions to SSHRC
- Use as a framework a number of suggestions I had prepared for a previous event
 - Will skip through them to highlight the stories that I think might be useful here
- My perspective on KM is based primarily on;
 - 20 years with CRRF – loosely connected network, annual conferences, rural concerns, researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, citizens, registered charity
 - 9 years with NRE Project – more academic, 15+ researchers, 11 universities (small), 32 field sites + 2 in Japan, multiple Partners, international
- There are many aspects of our experience which may be of interest to you as you proceed with your own projects, but I will concentrate on 4 of them – within a context of some more general points we have discovered along the way

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Identify Target Audiences

- Researchers
- Policy-makers
- Practitioners
- Citizens

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- *Clearly identify the target audiences with which you wish to engage.*
- (S4) In the case of the NRE Project, these are researchers (including students), policy-makers (at all levels of government), practitioners (including public and private entrepreneurs), and citizens (primarily rural-based but extending to urban citizens in strategic ways).
- The traditional target audience for our work is academics – KM pushes this to include the other groups
- For this we need to pay attention to new groups and interests and develop new skills

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Engagement and Dialogue

- Engage early
- Multiple venues of communication
- Appropriate means of communication
- Building trust is target-specific

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- *Ensure early, extensive, and continual engagement with these target groups.*
- (S) Engage early
 - The NRE built it on the extensive collaboration established by CRRF (10 years of conferences, workshops, consultations).
 - This meant that the key players were already involved and guided NRE development and expansion over the period of the grant.
- (S) Utilize multiple means of communication – cast the net wide
- (S) Utilize appropriate means of communication and engagement
 - E.g. Internet patchy in rural; Internet doesn't work alone
 - Research shows that Internet engagement requires a large pool and specific focus
 - Add to that the building of trust – face-to-face, opinion leaders, technical support
- (S) Use venues and provide materials in format that target audiences trust
 - Policy-makers and practitioners:
 - Require quick responses on rapidly changing issues
 - Look for new, challenging perspectives on these issues (buzz factor)
 - Few markers for success in communication – can be frustrating and discouraging – especially in the short term
 - Our research shows: Municipal Councils that include their citizens in the discussions of the issues, formulation of options, and action are much more capable of dealing with the challenges they face
 - Citizens
 - Initially – have very practical concerns
 - Require extended engagement to build confidence and trust
 - Eventually they began to understand what we were doing, became enthusiastic about the long-term and comparative vision we introduced, and made significant contributions to our work
 - E.g. Introduced Japanese approach to out-migration (not circle the wagons)

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Build on Existing Capacity

- Use existing organizations and networks
- Don't always meet your needs or expectations
- Identify and respect their interests
- Identify and accommodate their norms

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- *Use existing organizations and networks.*

- This reinforces the wisdom of the Strategic Clusters approach to building capacity and reflects our practice of collaboration with both formal and informal organizations.

- (S) Many groups are already mobilizing around the issues we investigate – with networks and a wide variety of approaches.

- (S) But they may not always meet your needs or expectations

- (S) Identify who they are, what are their interests, and how they relate to your research and personal interests.

- E.g. Our research revealed the critical importance of local governance for community vitality

- Sought out an alliance with FCM since they are well connected to municipal governments and related organizations

- Directed our research to rural churches after we identified them as an important contributor to social capital

- Our collection and analysis of information about rural newspapers and editors served as a basis for eventual dissemination of our results.

- (S) Remember that the social capital of these volunteer groups does not always rest on the same basis as researchers.

- Volunteers – they are in it for the shared interest. Therefore we must meet and support that interest in order to compete with the other demands on peoples' time (e.g. provide child care)

- SSHRC needs to be aware of this in program design (e.g. CURA adjustment)

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Bear the Burden

- Multiple demands on all partners
- KM means bearing the burden
 - Proactive liaison
 - Intelligence gathering
 - Telephone or face-to-face
 - Positive
 - Not researcher responsibility

Liaison
Officer

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• *Bearing the burden*

- All participants in KM are burdened with multiple demands
 - Researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, citizens
- Thus KM becomes one more demand on our time as we try to get things done
- Governments and funding agents must bear the burden of KM if they want it done
 - They are the most powerful in the relationship
 - Governments and researchers can seldom be equal partners with practitioners, volunteers, and communities in spite of the rhetoric of partnership
 - They should use their additional resources generously to achieve KM
- Researchers: Provide collection of insights (provide grist for the KM mill)
 - KM requires me to stop what I am doing, write something, attend a meeting, speak to someone, fill out a form
 - Even if I am committed to KM I may not know what it is about my work that is of interest to the various target audiences of how to package it to the best advantage (what story to tell)
- KM means taking on this burden
- We find that phone calls and 'press interviews' are often the best way to collect that information – least burdensome, most interesting (researchers like to talk)
 - Devote KM resources (not research resources) to
 - Doing research on our own researchers and partners (intelligence gathering)
 - Developing a long-term relationship
 - Telephone or face-to-face – non-critical, exploratory, positive
 - Frequent 'how's it going' calls
 - Briefing notes and inventories of key insights
 - Multiple levels of detail
 - Go back to the researchers for comments and responses
 - Feed back results so they can use them in promotion, tenure, lobbying, etc.
 - Proactive Liaison Officer (anticipates admin. problems at the same time)
 - Recommend this to SSHRC as well
 - Build into mid-term and final reports
 - Drafts, follow-up calls, and press releases
 - Note that I am not recommending this be done by researchers
- This same principle applies to researchers' relations with their partners

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Equalize Power

- Governments not equal partners
- Researchers not equal partners
- Powerful bear the burden

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- Equalize relations of power and maximize mutual respect as much as possible
 - (S) Government can seldom be an equal partner with practitioners, volunteer groups, and communities in spite of the rhetoric of partnership
 - (S) Researchers can seldom be equal partners with them – they do not have access to the resources, networks, and knowledge that gives researchers such an advantage
 - We discovered this in our initial engagement with the sites that were interested but incapable of responding.
 - We rediscovered it as our research proceeded – showing
 - Grant writing, competition for grants, accountability demands are all very onerous for voluntary groups
 - The concerns for fairness and accountability conflict with the norms that bring people together in volunteer groups: a common interest.
 - (S) Therefore the most powerful member in the partnership must bear the burden
 - Letter of intent with support for granting stage
 - Secondment and staff support for training, grant-writing, and finances
 - Go to them:
 - Our practice of holding our meetings in rural places has done much to convince our partners of our interest in them and at the same time provide support for the local economy, and create a valuable opportunity for policy-makers to meet directly with local citizens and experience rural life.

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Common Focus for Diverging Demands

- Must overcome diverging interests

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• *Identify and organize collaboration across disciplines and spheres but with respect to common, strategic foci.*

• (S) Problem: How do we get people with diverse backgrounds, competing demands, and different commitments to talk to one another?

- Find a common interest that cuts across as many as possible
- Our selection of geographically defined field sites and locations has served us well in this respect: they bring diverse interests together to address a common object of research.
- A common cause may also serve this function
- Regional nodes

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Structural Biases

- KM not part of promotion, tenure, grants
- Reorganize
- Strategic planning
- Challenge the institutions

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- *Provide the means whereby junior faculty and researchers can meet their institutional demands for their careers, while contributing to KM.*
- (S) This principle arises because of the reluctance of our educational institutions to recognize KM contributions in the awarding of merit, promotion, and tenure.
- As a result it is necessary for our junior faculty to publish in academic peer-reviewed venues to maintain or advance their careers.
- This jeopardizes the renewal process within our research community and often makes the extra demands of KM unattainable.
- Responses explored in the NRE Project
 - (S) Accommodate internal to the project
 - The NRE Project organized mentoring and publishing opportunities for junior faculty
 - shifted administrative demands to senior faculty members,
 - Shift the burden of rewriting and reorganizing academic products for non-academic audiences to senior faculty members in exchange for junior people to publish and build credibility for the project
 - We were able to do this because we had both research and KM activities integrated in the same project
 - (S) Prepare for the future
 - Mentoring junior faculty in KM activities and skills
 - (S) Challenge the institutions
 - Promotion, tenure, granting agencies downgrade KM activities
 - Legitimately question the quality of these activities
 - Therefore need to develop the criteria for quality
 - E.g. Draft proposal for Concordia
 - SSHRC Workshop Grants don't make it easy to include local people

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Organize for Flexibility

- New people need openness for KM
- Governance must reflect this
- Volunteers – therefore challenges of commitment and delivery

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• *Organize for flexibility and adaptation.*

•(S) New people, new organizations, and new ideas must be met with interest and openness if they are to contribute to the primary objectives of KM.

•(S) The governance structure must also be open and capable of adjusting to new conditions since many of the new insights are directly related to the strategic functioning of networks.

• This means identifying strengths and distribute resources and responsibilities accordingly

•(S) Challenges of commitment and delivery require strategic alliances

• NRE: using a buddy system – institutionally and individually works well to get over the crises

- Point and backup

- Unexpected benefits – lower organizational demands

- Maximizes mentorship

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Inclusion-Exclusion Tension

- KM must be inclusive
- Research must be exclusive
- Form strategic alliances

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- (S) KM must be inclusive (people with a wide variety of interests can feel comfortable)
- (S) Research must be exclusive (to meet professional and organizational criteria for quality and credibility)
- (S) The relationship between CRRF and the NRE Project has demonstrated how this can work to the benefit of all.
 - CRRF and more recently, the National Rural Research Network (NRRN) provide the open, public venues and our research Centres
 - NRE researchers and Partners provide the more exclusive projects required for academic research.
 - CRRF provides a forum to test new partners and for new partners to build confidence in the researchers.

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Reproduction

- KM is long term
- Plan for replacement and recruitment
- Celebrate

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- *Prepare for future recruitment and support.*
- (S) Since KM requires a long term investment
- (S) It is critical to plan for new participants
 - to support the project during periods of high demand
 - to contribute new ideas, and
 - to replace key personnel as the need arises.
- Since participation in such networks is essentially voluntary, the principles for mentoring and supporting all participants apply.
- (S) This includes the necessity for celebration.

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KIS Opportunities

- Best (and worst) practices
- Impacts
- KM criteria
- Improve reporting requests

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- These KIS Projects create a unique opportunity for SSHRC and social science research in general
- But it may be lost if something is not proactively done now – at the beginning of the program
- Collection of information and stories
 - Best (and worst) practices
 - Journalists (students) to call people up regularly (What's happening? What's exciting?)
 - Write up as stories
 - Make widely available
 - Liaison Officer – adopt the principle for KIS
 - Impacts
 - Challenges since they are multiple levels (individuals, groups, society) and highly time-dependent
 - Woman in our site who was inspired by our conference to open a library, then run for mayor
 - Site that marketed themselves as a conference centre after putting on one of our conferences
 - Groups in Japan, Australia, USA adopting our theoretical and methodological framework to construct programs similar to our Rural Observatory in their countries
 - Site that failed multiple times but in those failures developed the networks and skills to take initiative for community development (Tumbler Ridge, Mackenzie)
 - Journalists could do this as well
 - Identify criteria for KM excellence in projects and for individuals
 - Promote to universities, faculties, departments, and evaluation committees
 - Improve final reports to gather KM-relevant information
- In all of these things, bear the burden
 - Note that you have the basis in the KIS projects

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