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Community-Academic Research Enhances Engaged Scholarship

What is this research about?

Often, traditional research refers to universities as knowledge "experts" on social issues. However, engaged scholarship goes beyond research by including activities for teaching and social change. In doing so, research invites different communities to participate and inform research findings and outcomes. What are the practical, ethical and strategic gains from community-academic partnerships?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers reviewed the gains and challenges that emerged from a community-academic research partnership. Their SSHRC funded research project on economic security for senior immigrants in Canada serves as a case study.

The project consisted of three phases. First, they analyzed 2006 census data to examine ethno-cultural differences in economic security for seniors in Canada. Phase Two and Three saw research partnerships built with community members and service providers. As a group, these partners decided on the direction of the research after Phase One. They conducted focus groups and interviews to create new knowledge about issues for 14 ethnic senior groups.

They defined the gains and challenges from community and academic research as:

- **Practical**: reaching mutual outcomes through

What you need to know:

Community-academic research can enhance the capacity of all partners involved. It creates new knowledge that all partners can use, and can inform policy more meaningfully. It also brings engaged scholarship to researchers.

available resources, relationship building and shared decision making.

- **Ethical**: agreement on the research agenda's broad values and goals through guiding principles, full engagement, an open process and privacy.

- **Strategic**: Opportunities for social change by looking at policy problems, presenting solutions, building coalitions and seeking changes from organizations.

What did the researchers find?

The positive gains from community-academic research outweighed the challenges that came with the project.

Practically, all members of the research project became "co-leaners". Each partner was able to assess their needs and invest based on the desire for valuable data. Academics also found community input impacted the direction of the project. Community members believed it would be more useful to focus on distinct ethnic groups, and conduct more focus groups. They also took a lead role in these activities.

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The high costs of resources and the uneven quality of data served as challenges for mutual outcomes.

Ethically, the research project saw the creation of an advisory board that helped achieve mutually agreed guidelines and respect for all partners. Community partners felt engaged and value with the ability to influence and negotiate differences that affected the research project. Language barriers and handling privacy between service providers and community participants brought some challenges to the project's activities.

Strategically, community and academics revived struggles against social policies by creating new knowledge that could inform change. Both academics and community members found meaning in working together, rather than having a weak impact on their own. Thus, new knowledge is socially useful because it can be applied and shared on a wider social scale by distinct partners. Partnerships facilitate partners stepping outside their usual social locations, to become problem-solving policy entrepreneurs able to offer relevant insights.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers may find this study useful, as it offers major insight on the value of community-academic research findings. The diverse knowledge that emerged from research findings in these collaborations cannot be accessed by other types of data. Community leaders and agencies may also find this study useful. It may inform future partnerships with researchers, so that safe and equitable spaces to collaborate can be sought.

About the Researchers

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