

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Successful Networking Can Lead to Usable Products and Learning for All

What is this research about?

There can be a lack of meaningful exchanges between knowledge producers and knowledge users in policy or practice settings. Producers and users need to interact, but not all interactions are going to result in research impact. For collaborations to be effective and useful, interaction needs to occur on an ongoing basis. Interactions also need to result in products or changes that meet the different needs of network participants. Using the activities of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) as a case study, the researchers describe interactions that increase people's engagement with research knowledge.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers attempted to measure the CHRN's activities and their impact on interaction and knowledge exchange (KE). Key informant interviews were held with CHRN stakeholders. Stakeholders were interviewed by telephone, and discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed. The CHRN Director and Project Manager were also interviewed several times to elaborate on strategic activities and outcomes.

Google Scholar and basic Google searches were used to track the sharing of reports by the

What you need to know:

Networking can increase the usefulness of knowledge and inform the practices of all partners involved. These relationships can be kept through reciprocity and constant interaction between all stakeholders and researchers. Two key outcomes from this process are the creation of useable content and new learning from others.

CHRN director. Google Analytics were also used to gauge people's interaction with the Homeless Hub's website (a CHRN project). Findings from a 2005 conference consultation report were reviewed, as well as the CHRN's funding proposals, reports, and governing documents. A research assistant for the CHRN also developed summaries on the activities of the Graduate Students in Homelessness Research Network .

What did the researchers find?

Relationship building is crucial to create and maintain networks for KE. Collaboration and networking also allowed for informal KE activities. Through KE, CHRN served as a connector between stakeholders from different networks. This allowed stakeholders to do joint planning, align their agendas, and situate each of

their institution's work within a broader, national context of homelessness. They were also able to shape the activities, structures and outputs from the CHRN.

Reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships made for lengthy and meaningful connections between network participants. They also served as a measure for meeting each partner's goals for social change goals. The researchers found that reciprocal relations depended on active outreach by key leaders of the CHRN and other networks.

Networking also helped to facilitate:

- **The Production of Useable Content:** CHRN was able to develop research agendas that met the distinct needs of their partners. Partners included people in government and service providers. Stakeholders were also able to access and apply evidence-based practices because of access to a researcher database and an online resource library.
- **Professional Practice:** Stakeholders felt their work with the CHRN exposed them to different research methods and perspectives. All of this learning brought changes to their own practices related to homelessness.

How can you use this research?

For service providers, and policy makers, this research highlights the advantages of participating in a research network. The paper points to specific activities and network attributes that lead to productive relationships between researchers and service providers/policy actors. Scholars may also find this research useful. It refers to strategies on how to make one's

research more useful to diverse stakeholders, as the CHRN has done.

About the Researchers

Naomi Nichols is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow for the Canadian Homelessness Research Network at York University.

Naomi_Nichols@edu.yorku.ca

Dr. Stephen Gaetz is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, and Director of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network and the Homeless Hub, York University.

SGaetz@edu.yorku.ca

Citation

Nichols, N., and Gaetz, S. (2013). Strategies for Sustaining Complex Partnerships.

Keywords

Knowledge exchanges, Networking, Engagement, Reciprocity, Interactions, Usable content, Homelessness

Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

kmbunit@yorku.ca

www.researchimpact.ca

