



Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning
l'Alliance canadienne pour l'apprentissage par le service communautaire

If Not Now, When?

A call for Canadian policies to support
community-academic partnerships for
sustainable community development in a
global recession

A DRAFT Discussion Paper

July, 2009

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A call for Canadian policies to support community-academic partnerships for sustainable community development in a global recession

The need for a new approach to knowledge is clear. The Earth and its varied human and ecological communities are now facing large scale problems, from global warming and reduced biodiversity to more inequality between the poor and rich. Violence and fears of escalation are rampant. These are major challenges that require a wholesale shift in how we inquire into real life problems and mobilize or create knowledge to address them. To survive and flourish in a world fraught with uncertainty we must learn to think and learn differently. Knowledge can no longer be generated, accredited or communicated only in scientific, corporate, and university-based settings that exclude and ignore many segments of society. There is a need, more pressing than ever, to engage all human beings, without exception, in the application and co-generation of knowledge.

What is at stake is nothing less than the practice of dialogue and democratic engagement in the sphere of knowledge, and its application to all levels of our 'glocal' world, from a village engaged in planning sustainable development to regional, national or international bodies involved in health, education, economic development, governance or peace.¹

Two powerful forces are at play now in Canadian society that present unprecedented opportunities for community service learning² (CSL) and community-based research³ (CBR).

Neither of these forces could have been anticipated at either the founding of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (CACSL) or the onset of the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation's grant to CACSL four years ago through its University-Based Community Service Learning Program. In some respects, these forces are triggering what could be called a "perfect storm" for CSL.

Similarly, community-based research (CBR) has been heralded as a vital approach for addressing "...complex inter-related challenges that involve social, economic and environmental considerations in desired outcomes for Canadian society such as poverty reduction, social innovation, health promotion and environmental sustainability. [And as such]...it is not surprising that governments, research councils, public agencies, universities and civil society organizations are coming together to strengthen their relationships and opportunities for partnerships."⁴ All stakeholders in the fields of CSL and CBR must determine, very carefully and also very urgently, their strategy and commitments over the next five to ten years, how to collaborate, and what, really, is possible to accomplish together.

¹ Chevalier, J. M., & Buckles, D. J. (2008). *SAS²: A Guide to Collaborative Inquiry and Social Engagement*: Sage and IDRC.

² "...[s]tudents, educators and communities building partnerships to learn from each other while working together in innovative ways to strengthen individuals, communities, and society." Vision statement of Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning: <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/>

³ "Community-based research is creating and mobilizing knowledge for action by communities, civil society, policy makers, and stakeholders in all of the key areas affecting the future social, economic, and environmental sustainability of Canada. It engages communities and their citizens in the creation, design, implementation and use of research to meet their needs." Taken from CBR Canada website: <http://communityresearchcanada.ca/>

⁴ Research, O. o. C.-B. (2009). *The Funding and Development of Community University Research Partnerships in Canada*: University of Victoria.

Forces for Change

The first force is the worst *economic recession* in a century. Triggered in the United States, and now thoroughly global in character, this recession has hit the central Canadian heartland especially hard. In the Golden Horseshoe in southern Ontario, hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs with middle class wages—and probably five times this number again of multiplier jobs in the service sector—have disappeared, and are not likely to return. At the same time, an international slowdown in already volatile commodity markets, particularly in China, have caused companies in the forestry, metals and energy sectors to close plants and lay off tens of thousands more workers in all regions of the country, again triggering major service-sector job losses as well. Governments are using stimulus policies to kick-start the economy, but are already beginning to feel the severe reduction in corporate and household tax revenues that outlay for public services. For their part, non-profit organizations are navigating in a world of growing social need alongside a reduction in size and velocity of charitable donations and government grants.

Against this backdrop of economic crisis, Canadian households and communities must regroup and develop new strategies for sustainable community development. Beyond general declarations of support for green jobs and the creative economy, tax cuts and public works, our governments have no real plan for replacing the good jobs that have been vapourized or, indeed, for sustaining the middle class standard of living of the country as a whole. For their part, universities and colleges, already coping, pre-recession, with a more competitive environment for student recruitment and retention, are redoubling their efforts to enhance the student experience. Community engagement opportunities through community-based experiential learning, community-based research and volunteer service have, in this sense, moved even further to the center of the core business strategy of higher education institutions. But post-secondary institutions must intensify and expand these activities even as they make absolute cuts to their operating budgets, partly in response to pension-fund solvency obligations as well as for other reasons. They also must better demonstrate their value to the general public and to government if they are going to sustain their public funding in this challenging economic environment.

The recession, therefore, has created a situation where communities need new livelihood solutions, and new ways of maintaining social peace across their diverse constituencies. Equally, universities must find new ways of operating that are engaged and relevant to the regions in which they operate. Community-based approaches to service-learning and research can contribute to both of these processes.

The second force is the election of an *American President* who puts public service at the centre of his public-policy agenda. A former community organizer, Barack Obama actively uses his position, and his charisma, to urge his citizens to “stand up and do what you can to serve your community, shape our history and enrich both your own life and the lives of others across this country.” Indeed in April 2009, “...President Obama signed the bipartisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act into law. The Act gives permission to significantly increase authorized spending levels for service-learning and Learn and Serve America as a first step toward creating a new era of service and civic engagement in America.”⁵ With a budget of nearly \$6 billion over eight years, the bill would improve service learning in schools, expand incentives for students and seniors to volunteer, triple the number of

⁵ Service Learning Blog July 07, 2009. Supported by the National Service Learning Partnership <http://www.service-learning.blogspot.com/>

Americorps members to 250,000, and create five groups to create service options in “helping poor people, improving education, encouraging energy efficiency, widening access to healthcare, and assisting veterans.”

While the federal government in the United States plays a larger and more influential role in education than that of the Government of Canada, there is little doubt that this legislation could provide elements of a similar policy package at the national and provincial levels in this country. President Obama enjoys wide public and political support across Canada, and this is likely to persist through the first half of his term. Our politicians, already trying to associate with the President and his ideas, have never been more open to considering new policy ideas emanating from south of the 49th parallel. In Canada, therefore, the time is right for a concerted lobbying effort to put community service learning and other forms of community-academic service firmly on the agendas, and in the policy platforms, of all of the major federal parties as well as of as many provincial governments as possible. Ontario and Quebec are especially important focal points for such policy and lobbying work. At the same time, work must continue in building the capacity of all actors—governments, universities and colleges, schools, companies, and non-profits—to mobilize, support and strengthen the skills of larger numbers of those who would serve.

In addition, new policies and laws, informed by the American model but calibrated to the Canadian context, must be drafted, tested and then campaigned for; a broad coalition must be built to take this forward.

Blueprint for Change

The Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (CACSL) and Community-Based Research Canada (CBR Canada) are two examples of coalitions that have formed to support networking and knowledge-sharing across Canada. Many issue-based coalitions that use CSL and CBR have also been formed (e.g. food security, HIV/AIDS, aboriginal language and cultural revitalization, social economy in rural areas and housing and homelessness). Apart from the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a few other disparate provincial and national funding programs, there is no coordinated policy or systems-level effort supporting community and post-secondary partnerships that promote the use of community service-learning and community-based research as innovative, effective, and resourceful ways to address complex societal issues and affect meaningful education for the community leaders of today and tomorrow.

Until now.

With existing models in mind (e.g. Canadian Foundation for Innovation, Canadian Institutes for Health Research and the National Service Learning Partnership in the United States), the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning is calling for the creation of a **national, three-year pilot project** to focus exclusively on the task of creating provincial and national policies for “...supporting community and post-secondary partnerships that promote the use of community service-learning and community-based research as innovative, effective, and resourceful ways to address complex societal issues and affect meaningful education for the community leaders of today and tomorrow.”

With financial support from key voluntary, public and private sector organizations, this pilot project would have a three-fold mandate:

1. Investigate the formation of a **permanent mechanism** to promote provincial and national policies for "...supporting community and post-secondary partnerships that promote the use of community service-learning and community-based research as innovative, effective, and resourceful ways to address complex societal issues and affect meaningful education for the community leaders of today and tomorrow."
2. Affect **positive public policy change and increased funding** for community service-learning and community-based research at local, provincial and national levels.
3. Building on similar competitions like Faculty for the Engaged Campus⁶ in the USA and Forces Avenir⁷ in Quebec, host an **annual national competition** for initiatives that demonstrate and exemplify the principles⁸ of community service-learning and community-based research in action at the post-secondary level.

Organizing for success

We suggest the following principles to guide this initiative:

- There must be equitable community and post-secondary involvement from a process *and* issue-based perspective (e.g. research & teaching *and* HIV/AIDS). This involvement must build on the strength and knowledge of existing organizations, coalitions and networks.
- The pilot project should be based in the National Capital Region with formal ties in all provinces of Canada.

⁶ <http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/faculty-engaged.html>

⁷ <http://www.forcesavenir.qc.ca/en/>

⁸ CACSL believes community service-learning is a powerful form of experiential learning and community-university engagement when it features:

- Informed engagement, through participation in activities focused upon community-identified issues, contributes to community and regional development and is an avenue to achieve social, environmental, and economic justice.
- Effective communication between, and active participation of, all CSL partners in decisions about the planning, development, and evaluation of individual CSL programs and of CACSL itself.
- Reflective research and inquiry into the processes and effectiveness of CSL are crucial to its becoming an integral part of academic and community learning.
- Effective and creative application of CSL research to further enhance CSL practice
- Recognizes and respects multiple ways of knowing (e.g. academic knowledge, community-based knowledge, and indigenous knowledge) and believes they are complementary and mutually reinforcing.
- The sharing of resources, knowledge, and information; clear, inclusive communication; creative collaboration; and meaningful partnerships with stakeholders from all sectors: educational institutions, community organizations, students, the private sector, and individuals.

The focus of CBR Canada is:

- to build capacity for community-centered solutions
- to collaborate on the creation, dissemination and use of knowledge
- to uncover the root causes of complex issues facing communities
- to improve the lives of individuals and their communities
- to challenge our institutions to recognize and reward the value of community based research

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- Ideally, the pilot project would be hosted by a national voluntary sector or educational policy organization with strong experience in policy change at the provincial and federal levels.

To fulfill the pilot project mandate, the following resources should be considered:

<i>Human resources</i>	<i>Estimated annual costs</i>
Advisory Board and Committees	\$2000 x 30 = \$60,000 (honourariums)
President/CEO \$110,000	
VP Provincial Relations	\$100,000
Senior Policy Advisor	\$85,000
National Competition Director	\$75,000
Communications Director	\$75,000
Administrative Manager	\$65,000
<i>Other project resources</i>	
Meetings (e.g. teleconferences, refreshments, supplies)	\$20,000
Travel & accommodation	\$20,000
Overhead (e.g. rent, furnishings, utilities, phones, insurance)	\$40,000
Annual Total	\$650,000

Community service-learning and community-based research already demonstrates the power of community-academic work to positively affect people, organizations, and communities – economically, socially and environmentally.

We invite you to join us as we take this important work to the next level by contributing your thoughts and ideas and by participating to make this project a reality. In turn, the Alliance will continue to communicate broadly with further ideas and project developments.

For further information or to become more involved in this initiative, please contact:

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