

University-Community Engagement *in NB*

Building Innovative Partnerships



We were delighted to partner with the NBSPRN and the Town of Sackville in bringing together a wide cross-section of public policy officials and researchers who explored the connections and possibilities of including municipal governments and local communities in the overall policy research process. It was only through the highly efficient staff and well-established network of researchers at NBSPRN that we were able to see this event come to Sackville and to attract close to 50 representatives. The follow-up summary report and continued contact with the Network allows for these types of events to have a

lasting impact. The NBSPRN continues to be an important agent in creating an opportunity for increased interest and capacity in public policy development in areas relating to socio-economic policy by the research community and sectorial experts and practitioners, including municipal governments and local non-governmental groups. Our sincere thanks for your commitment to these partnerships in social policy.

Dr. Michael Fox, professor,
Department of Geography and the Environment,
Mount Allison University

What is the status of university-community engagement in New Brunswick and how can the public policy agenda be central to the relationship between the provincial government, universities and the communities across the province? That was the central question when Dr. Michael Fox, professor in the department of Geography and the Environment from Mount Allison University and the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network (NBSPRN) facilitated a policy workshop and luncheon in Sackville with a group of provincial and municipal government representatives, along with faculty, students, administrators from the various universities and community members from across the province on November 13th, 2014.

The purpose of this round-table event was to address the potential for a more strategic approach to the university-community engagement processes taking place across the province. In community after community with a university or community college, one

can find a range of active members who are working diligently at solving societal problems at the local and regional scale through public engagement, participatory research and imaginative partnerships.

Dr. Fox explains that community partnerships help universities to define and scope the research questions and provide access to research partnerships and sources of local expertise, as well as additional funding and in-kind contributions. In turn, universities provide communities with access to wide-ranging and in-depth knowledge and national and international expertise that informs and addresses community challenges and opportunities in a meaningful way. (AUCC, Ottawa, Momentum: 2008 report on university research and knowledge mobilization, 85).

During this session, university researchers, instructors, public administrators and practitioners, as well as provincial and civic public policy agents, elected representatives, community leaders, and students, joined us.

We discussed innovative ideas, best practices, and highly successful university-community partnerships that are alive and well in many places across the province.

Using a World Café model, we asked participants to answer a set of three questions and asked each group to report what they discussed.

The first question was, “How have university or college researchers and their students contributed to solving pressing public policy issues facing local and provincial governments?” We discussed various ideas such as including students early on in a research/community project because they offer a fearless and different way of thinking. The importance of building connections early on in a student’s first year was mentioned as a priority. Building those connections in a systemic way fosters a culture of engagement in students. Furthermore, university researchers have the capacity to look in our own backyard and use New Brunswick as a test lab when working on projects with government and community. We need to be more strategic and let universities know that the Government of New Brunswick and community organizations are receptive to collaborations. Participants also discussed the fact that collaborative projects are win/win. For example, a student working with a community organization will receive work and research experience, while the community organization will benefit from the research that contributes to the survival of the program. Lastly, participants articulated that we need to fight against the current culture of working in silos. Collaborative work will move people further along with fewer resources than working alone would.

The second question discussed was “What unresolved public policy issues exist at local, provincial, national or international levels that could be addressed by New Brunswick University or college based researchers?” During this session, participants raised the need to better promote initiatives in the province, as most do not know what others are working on. We need to know what is being done and what is working so that we may benefit from their positive outcomes. Other topics of discussion included building a Directory of Services for the province, looking at building affordable housing with mixed neighbourhoods, a need for better collaboration with government (in intergovernmental collaborations) and the need for government to identify policy issues so that researchers and communities may address these needs.

The final question discussed during the event was, “How can the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network work with government policy makers, researchers and communities to develop a more strategic and effective public engagement process?” Participants identified the need for the Network to connect partners early on in the collaborative process, help instructors and professors build community engagement initiatives into their curriculums and to revisit the academic reward model to possibly include community and government collaboration. Finally, participants discussed the need to have community and government keep an updated report describing their research needs.

This event led to engaging and interactive discussions among the community, policy makers and researchers. We would like to thank all those who took the time to participate in this event, the town of Sackville and Dr. Michael Fox. We look forward to having more events like this one with Mount Allison University again.

Appendix – A

Notes from the Participants

Question 1 - How have university or college researchers and their students contributed to solving pressing public policy issues facing local and provincial governments?

- Time to think and measure at a premium.
- Need to enhance thinking.
- Students bring a fearlessness/different way of thinking.
- Importance of building connections early in student's first year.
- How do we engage policy development in community more often.
- United way working with NBHC and community profile
- Looking for researchers to lay on more data/information and help other agencies see the benefits of data that already exists.
- Do we really value research?
- Research didn't seem to make difference in literacy.
- Importance of credibility of researcher/presenter.
- Our belief system affects how we see research.
- Need to create culture of engagement among youth.
- « volun-telling »
- World day of caring.
- Community engagement can help retain our youth.
- The great advantage that we have in NB is that universities are our best answers for public policy.
- We have the opportunity to look in our own backyard.
- Great success in working with communities from NB.
- Broader communication, using a good resource wisely.
- Knowing what each side wants/fine tuning would be something to focus on.
- Demographics are a key issue.
- Need to know what we want to listen and determine the next steps.
- PETL is building a research agenda...which other departments are going through this process?
- Collaboration between researchers and government is a win/win for both sides.
- We need to be better at asking for help.
- How do you engage better with the public?
- Matching research needs with the wants of community.
- Use the resources that already exist.
- Be strategic and let universities know that GNB is receptive to collaborations (and vice versa).
- Failure to communicate ... no one knows what everyone else is doing (and what's going on).
- How does dialogue work and how can we share it?
- Missing link between GNB and universities.

- Who do you call when you need research?
- How do we combat the « flavour of the month » when it comes to elected officials' priorities?
- What door do you knock on when you need research/when you need GNB?
- We have a major lack of sharing going on in the province.
- Asking a question that involves collaboration, which could lead to other collaborations.
- How strong are the collaborations across Canada?

Question 2 - What unresolved public policy issues exist at local, provincial, national or international levels that could be addressed by New Brunswick University or college based researchers?

- Better promote our own initiatives in the province.
- Directory of services
- Some kind of service to facilitate exchange of volunteer services.
- 211 nb.ca
- Affordable housing with mixed neighbourhoods.
- Tear down low-income communities and built mixed income neighbourhoods.
- NBHC integrated service delivery model play v. w.
- Trying to do from community up.
- Try to pilot in community -gather info to make case for change.
- Concrete evidence-based change.
- UdeM/V.W./Saint Mary's SSHRC Grant.
- Develop proposals that address community needs and government identified policy issues.
- Link proposals to governmental plans (5 year plans).
- Leverage money from other department.
- Municipalities have a policy agenda.
- Municipalities are more about getting it done than doing it right.
- Better job at pan government approach, opportunities for better intergovernmental collaboration, holistic approach.
- We're not engaging in public policy formation.
- Pan government view.

Question 3 - How can NB Social Policy Research Network work with government policy makers, researchers and the community to develop a more strategic and effective public engagement process?

- Engage partnerships/connect early in process.
- To get public engaged go where the public is.

- Need to get beyond talking to some group of people.
- 135 responses to online survey on recreation.
- Need to get different points of view.
- Building community engagement initiatives into curriculum.
- How do we get business engaged in social issues?
- Built economic case.
- University model had researcher questioning whether the partnership structure could limit his publishing options.
- Need to look at the academic reward model.
- Get everyone in the room.
- Take advocacy/partnerships role to move forward with partnership grants.
- Go in with ultimate goal.
- Update government/community report.
- Manage over the long term.
- Make the municipal associations aware.
- Marketing.
- Getting the discussion going with public engagement.

University-Community Engagement *in NB* Building Innovative Partnerships

Presented in partnership by: Mount Allison University
and the NB Social Policy Research Network

November 13th 2014 at the Sackville Town Hall from
12:00pm - 2:30pm

You are invited to this round-table event to address the potential
for a more strategic approach to the university-community
engagement processes taking place across the province.
Discussion facilitated by Dr. Michael Fox.

Who should attend?

This session will be of interest to university researchers and
teachers, public administrators and practitioners, as well as
provincial and civic public policy agents, elected representatives,
community leaders, and students who wish to participate in this
round-table discussion and luncheon.

Please RSVP to shawni.beaulieu@rrps-nb-sprn.ca by November 6th 2014

MountAllison
UNIVERSITY

RÉSEAU DE RECHERCHE SUR
LES POLITIQUES SOCIALES
DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK
rrpsnb
NEW BRUNSWICK
SOCIAL POLICY
RESEARCH NETWORK

