



INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph
www.theresearchshop.ca

Defining our Terms: Community Engagement and Knowledge Mobilization

What is community?

Community is defined as a community of interest, such as citizens and organizations working on issues of poverty, water conservation or the promotion of organic agriculture, or with a geographic focus as in the City of Guelph, a refugee camp in the Sudan, or a forestry district in northern British Columbia.

While **community** is readily (and regularly) problematized through issues of membership, cohesion, authority and boundary, community can be defined by attending to contextual factors that delimit scope and provide a lens for a particular substantive issue, problem or purpose. Clearly understanding the characteristics of a community determines strategies, partnerships and particular outcomes in successful community engaged work.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement includes attention to initiation, process and outcomes of relationship. Engagement is conceptualized along a continuum, ranging from informing stakeholders of new policy or research, through to having stakeholders make key decisions. More critically, engagement of citizens ranges from non-participation to degrees of tokenism through to genuine citizen power (as through Arnstein's Ladder of Engagement⁽¹⁾). Most often **community engagement** is taken to be beyond the purpose of information gathering or knowledge translation, to involve collaboration, dialogue and shared power and decision making.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching identifies community engagement for the academe as the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity."⁽²⁾

Community-university engagement then is practiced through scholarly activities such as community based research or pedagogical approaches, including

experiential learning that serves community need, as well as many other strategies such as partnership on land use and development, participating in purchasing cooperatives and volunteerism. Community engagement can be evaluated at the institutional, faculty/college, scholar and partnership level for principles and performance.

What is Knowledge Mobilization?

Knowledge mobilization (Kmb)* is a broad and encompassing term that includes the products, processes and relationships among knowledge creators, users, and mediators (individuals or intermediary organizations that support knowledge brokering). Kmb is where knowledge is moved “into active service for the broadest possible common good.”⁽³⁾ Mobilization is conducted by increasing “connectivity” or the multidirectional pathways for knowledge discovery, exchange and uptake.

“Knowledge Mobilization is not only a matter of producing more knowledge, but also of improving both **the desire and capacity for its use** as well as the **mediating processes**.”⁽⁴⁾

Greater interest from researchers, funders, institutions and communities to Kmb is evident by attention in addressing the research-practitioner gap, increased methodological and ethical valuing of citizen/user engagement in aspects of research, and in calls for greater relevance

and impact of university based research, among others. Growing areas of scholarship, such as implementation science and the scholarship of engagement also focus on knowledge mobilization, transfer and utilization.

Knowledge mobilization can include such activities as knowledge translation⁽⁵⁾ which is the adaptation of research results to suit specific audiences or receptors

Knowledge mobilization is the “process of creating value or a value stream through the creation, assimilation, leveraging, sharing and application of focused knowledge to a bounded community.”⁽⁶⁾

(expert to non-expert), and knowledge transfer, seen as the processes which market those research results to audiences. “Integrated KTT”⁽⁵⁾ can be equated with Kmb in that it encompasses more of the research and action cycle, and includes stakeholder engagement in shaping research questions, integrating findings and moving research results to practice.

Prepared by:

*Linda Hawkins, Director Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/the Research Shop
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, University of Guelph*

* Kmb is used rather than “KM” or knowledge management, which occurs within an organization, rather than exchange with external audiences or other Kmb components

References:

- (1) Arnstein, S.R. (1969), "[A Ladder of Citizen Participation](http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/outputs/annotated%20bibliography.pdf)", *Journal of the American Planning Association* **35** (4): 216–224, <http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/outputs/annotated%20bibliography.pdf>, retrieved 2010-06-12
- (2) "Community Engagement Elective Classification." *Community Engagement Classification*. Carnegie Foundation, 2010. Web. 22 Sept. 2011. http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php?key=1213
- (3) SSHRC (2008b). Knowledge impact in society: A SSHRC transformation program. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Available: <http://www.omrn-rrgo.ca/index.php?action=about.index>
- (4) Levin, B. (2008). Thinking About Knowledge Mobilization Paper prepared for an invitational symposium sponsored CCL and SSHRC May 15-18, 2008
- (5) Canadian Institutes of Health Research. *Knowledge translation*. Canadian Institutes of Health Research 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/41382.html>
- (6) Bennet, A and Bennet, D., With Katherine Fafard, Marc Fonda, Ted Lomond, Laurent Messier and Nicole Vaugeois. *Knowledge Mobilization in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Moving from Research to Action, In cooperation with The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)*. Accessed at: http://www.mountainquestinstitute.com/knowledge_mobilization.htm