EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE

A RESEARCH DISSEMINATION TOOLKIT

University of Regina

FACULTY *of* ARTS

COMMUNITY RESEARCH UNIT

DISSEMINATING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Community research projects are often initiated with action and change in mind. That is, the knowledge generated is intended to be used towards specific ends-- strengthening community programs, improving public policy, sharing vital information with community members.

But the research is only useful if it can be accessed and understood.

Creating a research dissemination plan involves a collaborative effort between research partners to identify the best ways to share knowledge for the project's particular purpose and target audience. Community Research Unit partners can use this document to develop a dissemination plan that ensures that their research is distributed to and understood by those who need it most.

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DISSEMINATION PLAN WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to organize your ideas as you read through this document and create your dissemination plan. This process will help clarify the dissemination plan and may also be useful in preparing requests for funding.

PROJECT DETAILS

Date	
Research Project	
Research Partners	

DISSEMINATION PLAN

Target Audience(s)	
Objectives	
Dissemination Method(s)	
Resources and Funding Available	
Resources and Funding Needed	
Timeline	
Assignment of Tasks	

I. Begin Early

Dissemination should be considered from the beginning of your project. Planning how the research will be shared can help guide the research process and maintain focus on the project's ultimate goal. And depending on the nature of the research, some information may be communicated before the entire project is completed. (E.g., news releases may be sent out at various stages of the project to generate interest and update the public on what's happening.)

One of the most useful questions for most community-based researchers consider when initiating a project is, **"Who will benefit from this knowledge?"**

II. Assess Dissemination Goals, Resources, and Limitations

Objective
- What are the goals of disseminating the research? Do the partners hope to expand community knowledge? Provoke action? Is there another intended goal?
- How will the community and university partners benefit? Other groups?

Audience
- Who would find this research valuable? Which groups may be able to incorporate research findings into their programming, policies, or future research?
- Who can take this research and turn it into action?
- What kind of reporting does your sponsor require (if applicable)?

User Needs
- How can your dissemination strategies be tailored to the specific needs of your target audience?
- What will your audience require (information, resources, other support) in order to understand and/or take action on your research?
- Which communication methods (text, graphs, web sites, presentations, workshops) would be most effective for reaching different audiences?
- If one of your target audiences is non-specialist, how can plain language and real-world examples be incorporated?
- How does your audience currently receive information— newsletters, conferences, professional associations, service providers? Can those channels be used in your dissemination?

Dissemination Methods
- How applicable are a variety of possible dissemination methods to the objectives of the project and the user needs:
  - Community, university, or private meetings/presentations?
  - Formal research reports?

Online outlets (web sites, blogs, e-mail networks)?
Press (newspapers, radio, television)?
Professional or academic conferences?
One-to-one meetings with community members?
Art or multimedia (installations, videos, performance)?
Others? (see "Dissemination Checklist")
- When should each method of dissemination be used?

Organizational Resources
- What skills, resources, and contacts are available among the research partners that may aid in dissemination?
- Are there opportunities to work with other community partners on the research project as a whole, or the dissemination stage specifically?
- Who will be the "contact person(s)" for project dissemination?
- Could the dissemination be funded through grants available to the community or university partners (for example, the CRU's Research and Action Fund)?

Addressing Potential Barriers
- What are the costs associated with the dissemination methods? Are funds available to cover these costs?
- Do the community and university partners have the resources and communication skills required for the dissemination, or may other groups or individuals be needed (for example, hiring someone to design a brochure)?
- If very different methods of dissemination are required for a variety of audiences, can resources be found for each method? Perhaps some must be delayed or left out altogether?
- What is the relationship between the community/university partners and the intended audience? Does the audience see the community/university partners as valuable sources of information? What relationship-building may be necessary (for example, involving members of your target audience in planning or providing feedback on the project)?
- If needed, do resources and time exist for person-to-person knowledge exchange, to supplement more formal dissemination methods?
- Will the research methodology and approach be understood and found credible among the target audience?
- How can time constraints (e.g., information must be disseminated at a particular conference or before a policy decision is made) be dealt with?

After Initial Dissemination
- How will dissemination be ongoing? Will individuals and groups be aware of the project in six months' time? A year?
- How will research partners archive information for the future? Who will be responsible for sharing the research in the future?
- How will research partners measure the success of the dissemination?

WHAT MAKES DISSEMINATION EFFECTIVE?

As you formulate your research dissemination plan, keep in mind that the most effective dissemination strategies:

Are Audience-Oriented. Ultimately, research dissemination is communication, and different audiences require different approaches. Good communication considers the practical needs, current knowledge level, and language/terminology preferences of the audience.

Focus on Goals. The dissemination should reflect the *purpose* of the research project, whether it be to inform, to motivate, or otherwise. Rather than simply reporting what the research uncovered, contextualize the information to help the audience understand why the research was done, what makes the results important, and what actions should be taken next in light of the research findings.

Are Selectively Chosen and Combined. There are a wide variety of ways to share knowledge, and not all will be suitable for a given project. Identify the dissemination tools that are likely to promote the goals of the research project (see "Strategy Overview"). If there is a broad target audience for the research, a combination of strategies might be used: an article in a community newsletter could reach local citizens, a website can be shared with organizations around the country, a formal report can be sent to political decision-makers.

Are Accessible. Consider what can be done to make the information available to those who have particular needs or who face barriers to access. For example, when planning a dissemination event, consider the venue's accessibility, the day and time of the event, whether childcare or transportation may be needed, whether an interpreter should be used, etc. Similarly, written materials should be available in a form and language that can be understood by the research's audience. Other accessibility issues may arise in relation to specific projects (for example, a website should be accessible to those who use text-readers, videos should be closed-captioned, and so on).

Make the Best Use of Available Resources. Collaborative research projects have the benefit of involving individuals from more than one organization, allowing access to a diversity of skills, networks, and resources. Research partners can take advantage of formal resources (e.g., organization coordinators may share research at community meetings or conferences, or university partners may use U of R's External Relations channels to publicize the project), but consider informal opportunities as well: for example, community partners may have relationships with other organizations that could support the dissemination effort, or faculty advisors may know other instructors who could incorporate the research report into their classes.

Allow for Two-Way Communication. Research indicates that dissemination strategies that result in new ideas and actions being implemented tend to be based on relationships and dialogue, rather than a one-way flow of information. To encourage the target audience

to understand and use the research, find ways to build a dialogue to explore how the research can be useful to specific audiences.

Are Clear and Focused. Your documents should:
- Be concise and to the point.
- Highlight the key research findings and recommendations.
- Define any specialist terminology used.
- Be presented in an attractive, readable format (use a clear, standard-size or large font and headings to organize the information)
- Except in certain very formal cases, include images, graphs, or bullet points to break up lengthy blocks of text.

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The following is a partial list of dissemination strategies that research partners may consider; for more ideas, see "CRU Research Dissemination List."

I. Press Releases

Press releases allow research partners to disseminate information to the media as well as other organizations. Press releases should generally not exceed one or two pages, and should include:
- Highlights of the research findings.
- Which organizations and individuals were involved in the project.
- Contact information for whoever will be the media contact(s).

At the University of Regina, External Relations has services to help promote university-related projects through issuing press releases and other external promotions. Contact: communications@uregina.ca

II. Research Report and Summary

No matter what the project, a summary of the research findings should be written—even if only for internal use. Projects that are meant to produce a formal research paper will have a ready-made document to distribute. Reports or summaries of the report can be shared with other organizations, with government, and with members of the academic community. Reports can be published on the University of Regina Library's Digital Archive and can be distributed through the Regina Public Library. Student researchers or faculty advisors may be able to present the report at conferences, or publish the report in an academic journal.

III. Posters, Brochures, Community Newsletters

Distributing information through brochures, flyers, and posters can be an effective strategy for communicating with a number of people quickly, and can be used especially to target specific neighbourhoods or populations (for example, using posters in high schools to communicate with teenagers). While these methods have severe space limitations, this can aid research partners in creating concise, easy-to-understand text that will communicate research findings with a broad population.

IV. In-Person Dissemination

Sharing knowledge through person-to-person communication may seem so informal as to not be considered a "strategy" at all—though personal connections are often the most effective in encouraging others to access and adopt the recommendations of the research. This type of dissemination can range from contacting colleagues through phone and email, to hosting an event, to presenting the research at a community meeting or professional conference. Those who take part in this type of dissemination should have a very thorough understanding of the project, including the research questions, process, and conclusions. Remember that participants in the research project (organizations, advisors, interviewees) should be given access to the research results (and thanked for their support!).

V. Online Distribution

There are many online outlets that can be used to disseminate research, including the websites of the partnering organization(s), blogs, and online newsletters and magazines. Some projects may lend themselves to new, unique websites being created to highlight some element of the research. Online documents have the advantage of being widely accessible, but remember that simply putting the research results online isn't enough: people must know where they can find the information.

CRU RESEARCH DISSEMINATION LIST

The following is a list of methods for Community Research Unit research partners to share knowledge. It is not an exhaustive list, and not every method listed will be applicable to every project. Some are suitable for communicating the knowledge gathered, while others focus on increasing awareness of the research project itself so that interested parties can then access the knowledge.

Media
☐ Press release sent to media outlets (see Strategy Overview: Press Releases)
☐ CRU/community partners write article for community newsletters
☐ Members of the media are invited to project-related events

□ Project highlighted in UR Update (Leader-Post) (Contact: External Relations, U of R)
□ *Degrees* magazine contacted, especially if alumni involved. (Contact: Greg Campbell, External Relations, U of R)
□ External Relations can help with promoting projects and events in the media. See http://www.uregina.ca/news/communicationservices.php for details.

Organizations

□ The CRU and/or the community partner sends electronic or hard copies of research reports to other community organizations that may find the report useful
□ The CRU and/or the community partner writes shorter or more specified releases/articles/case studies for other organizations
□ Partners offer to present research information at organizations' meetings
□ Partners join with other organizations to put the research into action (hosting an educational event, creating educational materials, etc.)

Student Researchers

□ Students encouraged to present at the U of R Graduate and Undergraduate Research Conference, (oral or poster presentation—no submission fee).
□ Students present at other conferences or events.
□ Students encouraged to write a blog post for YOURblog
□ Researchers encouraged to make class presentations on the project

Online Outlets

University of Regina sites:
□ PDF of final report added to U of R Library Digital Archive (CRU has access)
□ Project information added to CRU website "Projects" page and front page
□ Project information added to faculty advisors' web sites
□ Project highlighted in the Faculty of Arts magazine "Arts & Minds" (Contact: Kara Vincent, Faculty of Arts)
□ Project information sent to Office of Research Services, U of R (ORS publishes some stories about research projects on their website)
□ Student researcher creates blog post for U of R YOURblog (Contact: Shanan Sorochynski, External Relations)

Community Partner sites:
□ Project information added to community partner(s) website
□ Community organizations' websites link to PDF on U of R Digital Archive

Other:
□ Create a unique website for project information
□ Send information Relevant e-mail listservs sent information or link to online report

Libraries

□ PDF added to the University of Regina library digital archive
□ Prairie History Room (Regina Public Library) contacted to add digital link to their catalogue. (Contact: May P. Chan, Prairie History Room)

Faculty

□ Instructors with related research interests sent information/final reports
□ Instructors teaching courses related to the research are sent information/final reports (find courses using Class Schedule on U of R web site)
□ Reports sent to specific faculties/departments, where applicable
□ Project information shared with the University Community Engagement Network

Events

□ The CRU and community partners launch the research report with an event for university and community
□ Specific, project-relevant events in the community are hosted (museum exhibit openings, community walks, performances, seminars, etc.)
□ Associated faculty (supervisors) encouraged to give a public lecture/presentation (e.g. through university seminar series)

Other

□ Share research results with those research participants, interviewees, etc.
□ Fulfil sponsor reporting requirements, and remember to acknowledge funding support in other forms of dissemination.
□ Project highlighted in Community Research Unit display case (U of R)
□ Create and share a video for knowledge dissemination (the Community Research Unit has a YouTube account that can host the video).
□ Share knowledge with specific communities directly (presentations at schools, businesses, reserves, etc.)

OVERVIEW OF ONLINE RESOURCES

For more help formulating your dissemination plan, visit the links below. Many provide insight into research on dissemination strategies, as well as practical guidelines.

Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. (2010). "Developing a dissemination plan." http://www.chsrf.ca/SearchResultsNews/10-06-01/8e4193c1-f188-4e72-b5d7-0a43c63027a1.aspx

This brief publication of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation outlines eight key elements that dissemination plans could include. This article is not as thorough as most of the others included here; however, it may be useful as a quick overview.

Greene, S., Baldwin, L., Dolor, R., Neale, A., Thompson, E., & Christianer, G. (2011). *Research Toolkit*. Partnership-driven Resources to Improve and Enhance Research (PRIMER). www.researchtoolkit.org

Research Toolkit, "a toolkit for health research in partnership with practices and communities," is a comprehensive research site. It includes articles on each step of the collaborative research process, from working with multiple research partners, finding funding, to disseminating research results. Though the site is focused on health-related research, much of its material is widely applicable.

Harmsworth, S., & Turpin, S. "Creating an Effective Dissemination Strategy
        An Expanded Interactive Workbook for Educational Development Projects." (2000).
        TQEF National Co-ordination Team
        http://www.innovations.ac.uk/btg/resources/publications/dissemination.pdf

This very detailed workbook is an excellent step-by-step dissemination guide that includes many exercises that the research partners can complete together. The workbook would be particularly useful for projects that potentially have many dissemination outlets, or for projects with partners who are new to research and would like a more thorough explanation of different dissemination methods than this CRU document provides.

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research. (2001). "Developing
        an Effective Dissemination Plan."
        http://www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/dedp/

This document draws on a variety of published research on dissemination and outlines a step-by-step approach to creating a dissemination strategy. Though it focuses on and frequently refers to disability research, the information in this document is useful for all dissemination purposes. One useful feature of this document is the "Dissemination Planning Through Answered Questions" section, which provides a list of questions that research partners can ask themselves to help set dissemination goals and to determine the best dissemination plan for their particular project.

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research. (1996). "A Review
        of the Literature on Dissemination and Knowledge Utilization." Research Utilization
        Support and Help (RUSH)
        http://www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/review/

Though this literature review is not current, some content may still be useful for research partners who are putting together a dissemination strategy. In particular, this document's emphasis on research utilization may help research partners to consider the interrelationship between the medium of dissemination and the relationship-building that may be necessary between the researchers and the target audience. As this literature review notes, "Face-to-face contact facilitates the adoption of disseminated practices, to a far greater extent than the mere provision of information."

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research. (1996). "Improving
        the Usefulness of Disability Research: A Toolbox of Dissemination Strategies"
        http://www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/improve2/

This document provides a run-down of tips for creating a dissemination strategy, focusing on four elements of dissemination: source, content, medium, and user. The writers recommend giving consideration to how the source (researchers/research sponsors) are perceived in the community, how the content could be relevant to various other groups, what medium would be transmit the information, and how users will access, understand, and ultimately act on the research results.

Westbrook, J. & Boethel, M. "General Characteristics of Effective Dissemination and Utilization." Research Utilization Support and Help. http://www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/gcedu/

This site provides tips on crafting effective dissemination strategies, encouraging the researcher to consider utilization—how the research could be put into action—and to tailor dissemination methods with this in mind. The report suggests that merely providing information may not be effective—suggestions and assistance with implementation is critical.

Yale Center for Clinical Investigation. "Beyond Scientific Publication: Strategies for Disseminating Research Findings" CARE: Community Alliance for Research and Engagement. http://www.researchtoolkit.org/primer/docs/CARE Research Dissemination Guide.pdf

This document, found on the Research Toolkit website, is a thorough and easy-to-use resource for creating a dissemination plan. In addition to outlining several specific dissemination strategies, it takes the reader step-by-step through the process of considering the audience for the research results and tailoring publications to suit that audience through appropriate language, visual representations, etc. It includes a checklist of dissemination outlets and samples of various documents. A Microsoft Word version of this document can be found here: cira.med.yale.edu/research/dissem_strategies.doc