



**Looking Back, Looking Forward: Reflections and Recommendations for the Next Phase of Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE)**

A Community Food Security (CFS) Hub Discussion Paper

**May 2015**

*This project is supported by:*



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

**Canada**

## **Looking Back, Looking Forward: Reflections and Recommendations for the Next Phase of Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE)**

### **I. Overview**

The purpose of this discussion paper is to synthesize the collective reflections from the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), Community Food Security (CFS) Hub<sup>1</sup> (2012-2015) and to present initial proposals for action priorities to be implemented over the next four years of the project (2015-2019). This discussion paper was developed based primarily on interviews conducted with approximately 30 individuals representing the broad array of community- and campus-based partners related to the CFS Hub and reflections from the CFS Hub Management Team<sup>2</sup>. Your input is vital to this process. Please read this discussion paper and provide your feedback about whether and how the proposals would benefit your work in respect to community-campus engagement (CCE) within the CFS sector.

There are two ways to provide feedback: First, an interactive session will be held at the upcoming Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) Assembly in Ottawa on Sunday May 31, 2015 (Concurrent Session 2B: 2:45-4:15pm, Louis Pasteur 155). Please plan to attend this session if you will be at the CAFS Assembly. Second, if you are not able to attend the session, you can email written feedback to the CFS Hub Management Team via [charles.levkoe@gmail.com](mailto:charles.levkoe@gmail.com).

### **II. Background**

In recent years there has been growing interest in the “civic university” as a way to re-establish the legitimacy of academia in the eyes of the public<sup>3</sup>. One aspect of this renewed interest in the civic responsibilities of the academy is the increased commitment on the part of institutions, as well as research funders, to community-campus engagement (an umbrella term that encompasses community service learning, community-based research, participatory action research, and more). These models of teaching and research are intended to make campuses more relevant to the communities in which they are based, while giving students a more meaningful learning

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement and the Community Food Security Hub visit: <http://foodsecurecanada.org/cfice-community-food-security-hub>; <http://www6.carleton.ca/communityfirst/>

<sup>2</sup> The CFS Hub Management Team is made up of Charles Levkoe (academic co-lead), Cathleen Kneen (community co-lead), Abra Brynne (Community Food Secure Canada Staff Liaison), Lauren Kepkiewicz (Research Assistant), and Peter Andrée (former academic co-lead and CFICE principal investigator). This research was also supported by the work of community-researcher Rolie Srivastava.

<sup>3</sup> This introductory paragraph has been adapted from: Andrée, P., Chapman, D., Hawkins, L., Kneen, C., Muehlberger, C., Nelson, C., Pigott, K., Qaderi-Attayi, W., Scott, S. Stroink, M. (2014). Building Effective Relationships for Community-Engaged Scholarship in Canadian Food Studies. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur L'alimentation*, 1(1), 27–27.

experience. Effective CCE requires building respectful relationships and trust. There have, however, been critiques raised regarding a lack of critical attention to the motivations and impacts of these partnerships from the community perspective. These challenges include the allocation of funding, what constitutes valuable knowledge and outcomes and other issues that can serve as a barrier to relationship building and maintenance. As many partnerships are designed to meet students' educational needs or faculty publication requirements, community organizations often feel that they must fit their priorities into a predesigned package, resulting in conflicts over research agendas.

Recognizing these realities, CFICE was designed as an action research project with an overall goal to strengthen the ability of Canadian non-profits universities, colleges and funding agencies to build more successful, innovative, resilient and prosperous communities. Launched in 2012, CFICE is a seven-year project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The primary research question is: How can community-campus engagement be designed and implemented in ways that maximize the value created for non-profit community-based organizations (including Indigenous communities and their formal or informal organizations)? During the first phase of the project (2012-2016), the research has taken place across five thematic hubs – knowledge mobilization, community environmental sustainability, violence against women, poverty reduction, community food security<sup>4</sup>– doing on the ground research through demonstration projects. The main objectives have been to learn from the experiences of existing collaborations and identify opportunities for future action to strengthen CCE networks.

The CFS Hub operates as a collaboration between university- and community-based researchers, Food Secure Canada (FSC), the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) and many other community- and campus-based partners. The CFS Hub seeks to build on the culture of engagement that already exists and to identify how this emergent “community of practice” linked to Canada’s growing food movements can be expanded and its work refined. To help make CFS a reality in Canada, the Hub aims to build stronger links between research and policy advocacy, and to see that the research capacity of civil society organizations (particularly of those working at the grassroots level) is better recognized and linked to academic scholarship. It also strives to ensure that students contribute to the efforts of the organizations that are working to build just and sustainable food systems in Canada and are given the best possible grounding in “real world” experiences. Ultimately, the Hub aims to have policies and practices that better meet the needs of those marginalized by the dominant food system adopted by governments, and to support the multiplicity of food movements.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the definition from Hamm and Bellows (2003: 37), the CFS hub sees community food security as a “condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound diet through an economically and environmentally sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision making.” Also, the CFS Hub frequently uses the term “food sovereignty” to emphasize the priority for community control of decision-making in their food system.

In the second phase (2016-2019), CFICE will focus on strategic activities targeted at developing the infrastructure for longer-term change within civil society organizations, funding institutions, and post-secondary institutions. The specifics of these activities will be determined based on the learnings from the five Hubs during phase one (e.g. through data collected from the demonstration projects and general reflections) and through input from the many community- and campus-based partners involved in CFICE. The purpose of this discussion paper is to inform this process and solicit feedback by summarizing the CFS Hub’s learnings along with some initial proposals for action priorities from the Hub and from the CFICE Program Committee (the committee that links the co-leads of the five hubs).

### III. Learnings and Reflections (2012-2015)

#### *CCE Enablers and Barriers*

The chart below synthesizes some of the main themes that emerged about enablers and barriers to involvement in CCE.

CCE Enablers	CCE Barriers
<p><b>Unpacking assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ‘Disaggregate Community’: Unpack the concept of ‘community’ in order to acknowledge distinct needs and assets of the diverse organizations and populations involved.</li> <li>● Strong CCE work often brings multiple actors to the table. It is rarely just a dualistic community/campus arrangement.</li> <li>● Food movements have many actors who share both “academic” and “community” identities. This can be an enabler, but also presents new challenges.</li> <li>● Valuing community knowledge: Sometimes community knowledge is seen as a subject of study and not as a valid knowledge source.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Simplistic definitions of “community” in CCE work that don’t take into consideration different types of actors involved (this is true both within the community and within the educational institutions).</li> <li>● Assuming that CCE means a relationship between only one campus actor and only one community actor. Multiple actors are involved in any project (directly or indirectly)</li> <li>● Assuming that faculty’s role is to teach, the student’s role is to learn, and community partner’s role is to provide a laboratory or set of needs to address or explore. The roles and boundaries between academics and communities can be complicated and overlapping at times.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish the CCE relationship around a shared “vision” first: Identifying specific mutually beneficial projects comes after.</li> <li>● Community First: CCE can work better when it’s led by community needs and done at a grassroots level. This means research questions should be generated by communities that are involved throughout the research process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We can’t assume everyone is on the same page and at the same stage.</li> <li>● Lack of agreement on partnership frameworks (e.g. values, goals, theories, methodology, etc.) can hinder the potential benefits of a project.</li> <li>● We can’t assume that one type of CCE is the right model. Transformative CCE (built on strong horizontal relationships) is a valuable goal, but there remains a place for more traditional forms of CCE (e.g. academic as consultant model) too.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Building Relationships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Partnership work begins through personal relationships and connections. It's about two people (or sometimes groups) sharing a concern about an issue and then bringing their resources together to address that issue.</li> <li>● These partnerships also need organizational buy-in for long-term success. They need to align with the mission and support systems of partnering institutions and management</li> <li>● Face-to-face meetings are preferred as a way to maintain relationships and strengthen communication between partners. At the very least, it is important to hold regular phone meetings (e.g. check-ins) with partners.</li> <li>● Once trust is established, start to develop MOUs, terms of reference, and/or protocols to help ensure all key players are on the same page. This takes time and sensitivity. It cannot be rushed, especially with new partners.</li> <li>● The time required for this process needs to be factored into funding arrangements which may need to span more than one academic or fiscal year.</li> <li>● Students and faculty with a high level of commitment and interest in the issues being addressed by the non-profit partners is highly desirable. While not necessary, a partnership that is based on common goals/objectives/values can help build long-term relationships with greater impact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Negative or problematic personal relationships can severely hinder a partnership.</li> <li>● The transient nature of faculty, students, volunteers and staff can be frustrating.</li> <li>● Strong and effective partnerships can collapse under leadership transitions or strong personalities. Partnerships should avoid over-reliance on one or a few individuals.</li> <li>● There is a lack of incentives to engage in CCE work. Among faculty, CCE work has little recognition or opportunities for promotion within the university and among community partners, there is little compensation for time invested.</li> <li>● We can't simply assume there is trust or commonality of vision.</li> <li>● Sometimes communities are not seen as partners but used as academic objectives.</li> <li>● Partnerships between communities and academics can involve a variety of power differentials. These cannot be ignored or assumed not to exist.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Contextual fluidity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cultivate fluidity in relation to context: The framework of 'contextual fluidity' includes seeing the relationships and the vision at the heart of the work, while remaining open to shifts and new opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Being too rigid in plans and expectations can limit fruitful CCE projects.</li> <li>● We can't assume that partnerships built between organizations will remain if/when the people involved change.</li> <li>● There are often limited short-term benefits to CCE work.</li> <li>● Timelines and funding cycles between academic and community partners rarely align.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilitating CCE relationships/projects:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CCE facilitators need to nurture the capacity to engage: This means adopting a community capacity building approach (including all those directly and indirectly involved) to bring diverse actors together.</li> <li>● Facilitators can help navigate bureaucratic and administrative elements to enable partners to do the work. This can include invoicing, funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All partners may not have the skills they need to work together effectively. Training may be necessary.</li> <li>● Timing is a serious challenge for all partners (who tend to do this work off the side of their desks). Without supportive infrastructures, projects tend to repeat the same mistakes and are not able to build on previous learnings.</li> <li>● The quest for, and management of financial resources</li> </ul>

<p>applications, ethics, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing platforms for engagement among a wide range of demonstration projects to share knowledge and experiences is extremely valuable (e.g., opportunities to meet at conferences, hosting webinars and/or teleconferences).</li> <li>● Being able to provide monetary support for CCE projects is extremely helpful and appreciated. Non-profit organizations rarely have funds to support this work and unless it is directly connected to a specific project, it is important to compensate time, administration, evaluation, travel, child-care, etc.</li> <li>● It is also important for facilitators to broker connections between local partnerships and broader networks at different scales.</li> </ul>	<p>is a challenge. In part, this is because grant funds, by their nature, create closed-end relationships.</p>
<p><b>Cross-cultural relationship building:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning to work respectfully and effectively with Indigenous communities teaches lessons that can be useful in other CCE partnerships (e.g. acknowledging ongoing processes of colonialism and discrimination).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There are structural challenges that exist for cross-cultural relationship building and the creation of equitable food systems in the context of colonialism.</li> <li>● Individuals and institutions often seek to partner with/in marginalized communities but lack the cultural competencies, respect or expertise to do so.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evaluation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluation is important from the start, but needs to be set up so that priorities can shift over time.</li> <li>● There is a need for a flexible feedback system of evaluation that is built into CCE processes from the beginning of project. It may take more time but it can lead to better outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There are limited examples or indicators for how to do long-term evaluation of CCE projects.</li> <li>● Evaluations are difficult because there are no profound short-term gains (e.g. one year is too short to adequately evaluate CCE).</li> <li>● More work is needed to develop simple but compelling ways to measure the quality and impact of partnership work - especially from the perspective of community. Evaluation by academic standards can be based on outcomes, metrics etc., whereas for community work process is much longer (e.g. process may be the outcome).</li> <li>● Successful engagement programs and partnerships abound, but their stories are rarely captured and disseminated.</li> </ul>

## ***Reflections on Ways to Improve Community-Campus Partnerships***

The following are some of the key ideas that came out of the interviews on ways to improve community-campus partnerships:

1. Develop brokerage platforms between academics and community groups that support CCE at an institutional level
  - Develop clear protocols for working with food movements and in Indigenous communities
  - Develop a web-based database to connect academics and community groups
  - Create technological platforms and infrastructure for partnership building
  - Provide opportunities for meeting face-to-face with other CCE projects to share experiences
  - Engage with networks that can broker, support and expand relationships
  - Establish community-based brokers who understand the contexts in which the different partners are working
  - Make the academic cycles and needs related to funding, research, publications, student intake and engagement more transparent to community-based organizations
2. Initiate high-level conversations with key players (e.g. funders, researchers, academics, community representatives, etc.) to address the institutional barriers that make it difficult for community organizations to engage with campuses (e.g. paperwork, ethics, bureaucracy, etc.)
  - Streamline excess bureaucracy for small organizations that don't have the capacity to take on this work
  - Discuss new community-based research funding models
  - Align funding cycles with organizational timelines
  - Allow for remuneration of CCE work done by academics and community members (community partners in particular need to be compensated for their participation in CCE)
3. Encourage stronger faculty engagement in CCE
  - Articulate the value of CCE for academics beyond traditional incentives (e.g. publications, pay structure, etc.)
  - Change the culture around CCE in campus-based institutions (e.g. challenging the privileging of certain types of research and knowledge over others)
4. Develop a shared evaluation tool for CCE
  - Communicate clear benefits of evaluation
  - Develop long-term evaluations that begin at the early stages of the project that track impacts and relationships over time
  - Define evaluations based on the context of the project and relationship
  - Take a developmental approach by looking at relationships as complex and understanding that people come to the relationship from their own history and context

- Share CCE failures and not just successes
  - Support partners to build the story vs. telling the story
5. Develop a CCE manual or policy papers
    - Include information on how to apply for funding that allows for stipends for community members (for community- and campus-based actors)
    - Include information for organizations on how to use the results of the research generated from the partnership as well as information on the value of data and research
    - Include information for academics on how to disseminate and share results in a way that has practical relevance for communities and that reaches audiences outside of academic circles
  6. Recognize that CCE is one part of maximizing value for community organizations
    - CCE must work in tandem with other approaches to address larger structural challenges that inhibit the ability of community organizations to do their work

#### **IV. Initial Proposals for Action Priorities for Phase Two of the CFICE Project**

In March 2015, the CFICE Program Committee (made up of the academic and community co-leads from the five different Hubs) came together to share the learnings from their Hubs and to discuss initial proposals for action priorities in the remaining years of the project.

Based on the mandate of CFICE the following criteria were used to develop the proposed action priorities. The action priorities should:

- Show promise for having a significant impact on improving the effectiveness of CCE at the level of civil society organizations, campuses, or funders;
- Be supported by evidence gathered in phase one;
- Be important to our community partners;
- Be achievable within our current or accessible resources (financial, time, etc.); and,
- Involve the work of two or more Hubs.

Based on the experiences, learnings and reflections from the five Hubs (including the information presented above) there are three general areas proposed where action might occur:

1. The first proposed action area focuses on *aligning institutions for community impact*. This might include taking action on addressing:
  - Resourcing and funding issues that impact CCE such as reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility, piloting projects with different funding methods, or hosting a funding strategy conference
  - The roles that students play in CCE

- Institutional factors such as hosting a focused high level multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral discussion on CCE in Canada, developing models of CCE systems and assessment tools for post-secondary institutions to assess their capacity to engage, taking actions to address institutional barriers that impede community engagement on campuses, and taking actions to encourage stronger faculty engagement in CCE (e.g., lobbying for promotion and tenure criteria, establishing academic specialization in community engagement)
2. The second proposed action area focuses on *community-first partnership tools*. This might include taking action on addressing:
    - The components of partnership such as working with community-based organizations to define and measure CCE impacts, to create technology platforms and infrastructure for partnership building, to develop a shared evaluation tool for CCE and to develop CCE resources (e.g., a handbook on CCE, for faculty, students, and community organizations, training modules for students, etc.)
    - Partnership models such as doing a comparative analysis of different Hub organizational structures and governance models, and developing protocols for CCE
    - Partnership processes (e.g., building relationships)
  3. The third proposed action area focused on *community-based brokering* models. This might include taking action on:
    - Studying and piloting brokerage models and/or platforms to support CCE at an institutional level, advocating for brokering services, and developing proposals for brokers at different levels

## V. Questions for Reflection

Once you have read this discussion paper, please reflect on the initial proposals for action priorities for phase two of the CFICE project (Section IV) and reflect on the following questions:

1. Do these three action priorities speak to the needs of your organization/institution when it comes to making CCE more effective in food movements? What specific impacts could they each have?
2. What are the specific activities you would like to see within each of these three proposed action areas to ensure that CFICE remains responsive to the needs of the CFS community as it enters phase two?
3. Do you see any important priority action areas that are missing?