



Scaling up community-based research: A case study

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Abstract

Community-based research generally focuses on achieving benefits for both communities and researchers on a local, place-based scale. This case study profiles the six-year evolution of a community-based social enterprise sector survey across Canada. What started as a class project, and then a one-time study of two provinces, grew, over time, to become a pan-Canadian social enterprise sector survey. The evolution of the survey was led by social enterprise intermediary organizations within provinces who recognized the potential value of the initial survey in their own context. This case study demonstrates that with time and commitment, the core values of community-based research can be successfully scaled-up.

Keywords: community-based research; survey; scale; participatory research; social enterprise

Key messages

- The principles of community-based research can be scaled-up across jurisdictions when they are clearly held by both researchers and community intermediaries.
- Dedicated community intermediaries can play a lead role in initiating research, defining research questions, engaging in research and disseminating results back to the community.
- Research becomes both timely and relevant when the community and researchers collaboratively build and implement the research process and the community has ownership of the research outcomes.

Introduction

A community-based approach to research is distinct in its focus on collaboration and social transformation. Community-based research (CBR) is conceptualized as a form of participatory research that responds to societal needs by merging the practical knowledge and experiences of community-based entities with knowledge from academic and research institutions. CBR is used to describe research conducted by community groups without the involvement of universities or research institutions (Tandon *et al.*, 2016; Kapucu, 2016). Terms such as community-wide research,

community-involved research and community-centred research have also been used to refer community-based research (Israel *et al.*, 1998).

Much of the literature pertaining to profiles and case studies of CBR are place-based, addressing the issues, needs and aspirations of communities at a local level (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Kennedy *et al.*, 2011; Schultz *et al.*, 1998; Minkler *et al.*, 2016).

In contrast, this paper argues that survey research that is scaled up to the provincial (territorial, state), or even the national scale, can still hold true to the promise and intents of CBR.

This 'survey research' project was consistently, deliberately and explicitly positioned by both the co-researchers and community partners throughout the six-year survey process as a community development tool that could help to foster and build their respective communities of social enterprises. Thus, the scale of this initiative moved beyond the local in two respects. First, the community partners were themselves either a provincial organization or lead intermediary in the non-profit, cooperative or social enterprise community space. Second, the survey research was conducted on requests from each province/territory. By the time the project was completed, a survey had been conducted at least once in each province and territory of Canada (except Quebec) and was repeated in six provinces. The invitations to conduct and repeat the survey reflected the value of the survey to community partners and provided an opportunity to build ongoing collegial relationships. Both survey methods and knowledge dissemination strategies were modified across the multiple surveys while capturing an emerging and increasingly comprehensive picture of the impact of responding social enterprises in Canada.

The literature informing our understanding of the CBR model's relevance for this case is outlined in the next section, followed by a profile of the creation of the first two surveys and the community-led expansion of the surveys to other provinces, and the engagement of the community partners in the design of the research instrument, the data analysis and the report writing. Finally, observations, learnings and consequences of scaling up community-based research are presented.

Literature review

Community-based research (CBR) seeks to democratize knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination. The goal of CBR is social action (broadly defined) for the purpose of achieving (directly or indirectly) social change and social justice (Strand *et al.*, 2003). Community-based research and community-participatory research are similar to action research and participatory research methods through their focus on practical generation of knowledge but differ in the emphasis on community engagement as a central component of its enactment. The CBR agenda deviates from other research approaches by its sustained engagement with community, and centres community rather than university interests; indeed, CBR encompasses research done by community groups without the involvement of a university. When universities are included, CBR is a collaborative enterprise between academics and community members.

This research adopts Strand and colleagues CBR model that is based on three features: collaboration, democratization of knowledge and social change. The collaborative nature is evident in CBR's emphasis on partnerships between community members and/or organizations, government and academic or research institutions. Taken from a higher education perspective, 'community-based research is the

systematic creation of knowledge that is done with and for the community for the purpose of addressing a community-identified need' (Strand *et al.*, 2003: 8). The ideal CBR approach is fully collaborative, with the community working with researchers at every stage of the research process.

However, full collaboration and equal participation is not always attainable due to variations in time, expertise and level of interest; in such cases, community members must be fully involved in identifying research needs and questions, and in the final phase, when the results are disseminated and implemented (Strand *et al.*, 2003). The level of participation of community members can be influenced by the nature of the problem and available resources (Kapucu, 2016). As a result, some research maintains collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research with community members (Israel *et al.*, 1998). In other cases, community participation is limited to specific research activities, such as convening community advisory groups (Flicker *et al.*, 2008).

CBRs collaborative nature is evident in a number of contexts, including public and environmental health, community-based conservation, community sustainability, urban planning and public administration. Examples include the use of surveys to examine nutritional problems related to food intake and food security on a research project comprising academics, public officials and community residents (Kennedy *et al.*, 2011). Community leaders are involved in the entire research project, including identification of research topic, research design, research collection and analysis and the dissemination of findings in local, regional and national contexts. The study findings are crucial in developing community-centred interventions.

Similarly, the Connected Communities in the United Kingdom presents an example of large-scale research collaboration. Since 2010, the programme has funded over 300 projects, involving over 500 collaborating organizations, and has worked with more than 700 academics in the UK (Facer and Enright, 2016). The community is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and consists of various projects ranging from civil society and social innovation to culture and heritage. The collaborations have resulted in mutual learning between universities and community partners, the building of networks and alliances, and the development of new language related to issues in the community.

Second, CBR is linked to the 'democratization of knowledge' (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Kennedy *et al.*, 2011; Kapucu, 2016; Tandon *et al.*, 2016). This aspect is achieved through generation of knowledge from multiple sources and willingness of researchers to be flexible in changing research methodologies to enhance community participation and empowerment or improve the usefulness of the data (Strand *et al.*, 2003). Community members are also involved in the dissemination of knowledge.

The third feature of CBR is connected to its ultimate focus on social change. Outcomes of CBR revolve around policy change, knowledge mobilization and awareness creation on pertinent and complex issues. Benefits of CBR include the involvement of local people in the research process in identifying community problems and implementation of subsequent interventions. CBR yields the potential to advance capacity building for local community organization through the transfer of knowledge, skills, capacity and power (Israel *et al.*, 1998).

The collaboration between the West Harlem Environmental ACTION Inc. (WE ACT) and the Columbia University's Center for Children's Environmental Health illustrates the potential of research involving community in enhancing social change (Minkler *et al.*, 2016). One of the key research goals was to study and address diesel bus

and related air quality issues in a low-income community. While the research problem emerged from the community partner, the methodology was mainly developed by academic partners. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identified 'hotspots' with heavy foot and vehicular traffic, and researchers from Columbia University were assigned to these areas. The researchers trained youth and provided general study oversight and mentoring during fieldwork. Research outcomes from this study included the conversion of New York City to the use of clean diesel and the installation of permanent air monitors in Harlem and other hotspots by the EPA.

Another similar study took place in six rural low-income communities (Couto, 1987). A survey was developed to measure the effectiveness of a community-based intervention in maternal and infant health and development. University students trained women in interviewing techniques and sampling methods, and provided oversight in the completion and coding of questionnaires. The study's findings generated important information on hunger, poverty and inadequate health insurance of women and children in each community. One unanticipated outcome of this study was the employment of women who had participated in the survey when the programme established services to low-income pregnant women and mothers with infants.

These three central features of CBR—collaboration, democratization of knowledge and social change—were evident in our research. Similar to existing studies, the study was proposed by community stakeholders and relied on their knowledge and input throughout the research process. Community stakeholders had significant impact on the study's goals and final reports. The research outputs included a survey manual and reporting template that were intentionally developed to ensure that community members had resources that they could use to conduct their own research and report their research findings in future projects. Importantly, the research findings provide the first outlook of social enterprises in Canada and have the potential to impact policy at local, regional and national levels. The next section discusses the origin of the study, the involvement of key stakeholders and subsequent expansion from local to national contexts.

Background

Between 2006 and 2011, a nationwide social economy Community–University Research Alliance (CURA) was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), with regional research nodes or hubs implementing self-defined research projects in collaboration, to various degrees, with community partners (Hall and MacPherson, 2012). The Community–University Research Alliance research node of which we were a part was based in British Columbia and Alberta (Wulff, 2017). Beginning in 2010 and ending in 2016, we were engaged in an ever-expanding series of provincial and territorial surveys of social enterprises in collaboration with community partners. What started in a class project in spring 2009 as a modest research project designed to focus on social enterprises in the province of British Columbia, grew, over time, to include all provinces (except Quebec) and the three Canadian territories.

A total of 18 provincial/territorial surveys were completed over a six-year period with ten community partners who worked in collaboration with two co-researchers and one research associate (Elson and Hall, 2017; Wulff, 2017). Funding for the surveys included the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2010–12); Enterprising

Non-Profits Canada (www.socialenterprisecanada.ca/en) (2013–16); Simon Fraser University (www.sfu.ca); the Institute for Community Prosperity (www.mtroyal.ca/nonprofit/InstituteforCommunityProsperity/index.htm), Mount Royal University; and generous local sponsors and supporters. The co-researchers and research associate were university-based, while the community partners were provincial social enterprise intermediaries with ongoing connections to the social enterprise community. These intermediaries advocate to government for policy changes, provide training and marketing programmes and generally act as incubators for emerging social enterprises. These intermediaries saw the survey as a means to build a policy case beyond prior anecdotal evidence, identify the scope and nature of social enterprise initiatives within their community, and identify emerging policy and training needs so the social enterprises could grow in a supportive policy and market environment.

Canada is a large country geographically, incorporating four time-zones and more than 36 million people who are dispersed across a land mass of almost 10 million square kilometres. However, the number of intermediaries involved in the social enterprise community is relatively low, and are well known to each other. Often there are one or two leading intermediaries in any given province or territory. Annual social enterprise conferences and the Social Enterprise Council of Canada provide regular opportunities for networking. We used these opportunities to host dedicated meetings to discuss ongoing and completed surveys, build relationships with pending or new partners, and connect community intermediaries to each other.

When this survey project was initiated in 2010, these networks provided an opportunity for the initial survey and its report to come to the attention of fellow intermediaries (see Table 3). At the same time, there are significant cultural differences that were identified and accommodated throughout the survey process. The first was language. French is not only one of the two official languages in Canada, it is the working language of many social enterprises across Canada. One of the steps we took with our community partners was to collaboratively have the survey translated and adapted for completion by French-speaking respondents.

Second, there are variations in the history and landscape of social enterprises across Canada (McMurtry and Brouard, 2015). In some provinces, co-ops had a significant and important role to play in the development of enterprises with a social purpose; in others, social enterprise evolved from the charitable non-profit sector. Third, there were many well-established yet varied networks of segments of the broader social enterprise community in each region. Where these networks existed, the provincial intermediary reached out and invited them to become survey respondents. In some cases, a dedicated report, profiling their contribution, was developed. Finally, there were numerous occasions throughout the survey process when timelines had to accommodate contextual differences, whether planting or harvesting season in the West, or festivals and community events that would divert attention from potential social enterprise survey respondents.

How it all started

When brainstorming potential research projects in 2008 with a mix of community partners and university-based researchers in British Columbia and Alberta as part of a social-economy-focused community–university research alliance, we jumped at the opportunity to initiate a project that would be valuable to social enterprise practitioners in the field. The idea, coming from a lead community partner in the social enterprise space in British Columbia (Enterprising Non-Profits), was to conduct a survey to provide

lead proponents of social enterprises with impact data that could be used to enhance and complement anecdotal information on specific social enterprises that had been the norm to that point in time.

However, not everyone in the CURA was persuaded, and the project was not initially funded by the partnership. Those not persuaded that a conventional survey was useful and/or practical included both academics and practitioners. Instead, with support from Enterprising Non-Profits, in 2009, one of us conducted a survey in British Columbia as a student assignment for a class they were teaching at Simon Fraser University (Allen *et al.*, 2009). Having established the viability of a survey-based approach in 2010, we initiated the first full survey of social enterprises in British Columbia and Alberta with the support of the CURA. The class experience and survey instrument was used, in part, as a baseline to develop a survey instrument.

Thus, Enterprising Non-Profits (ENP), based in Vancouver, BC became the primary instigator for this initial survey research, and remained an ardent supporter and critical analyst of the survey work throughout the full tenure of the research project. This level of engagement set the tone for initial surveys in British Columbia and Alberta, and subsequent surveys across the country. As the activist proponent remarked on more than one occasion, 'if I am going to be involved with academics, I want a result I can use' (personal communication, 2009). CURA resources allowed us to hire students in Vancouver and Calgary as research assistants to reach out and conduct the survey work, and to solicit responses by mail, fax, email and phone.

Mindful that the definition of social enterprise was, and is, contested, we looked to our community partners to validate our operational definition. The operational definition of a social enterprise chosen for this survey was, 'a business venture, owned or operated by a non-profit organization that sells goods or provides services in the market for the purpose of creating a blended return on investment; financial, social, environmental, and cultural' (Elson and Hall, 2012: 220). It should be noted that this did exclude from most surveys, important actors in the social economy, including cooperatives, and enterprises owned or operated by municipal and First Nations governments.

The core survey itself was designed to be completed in less than 25 minutes by a lead representative of the social enterprise, and consisted of five parts. The initial portion of the survey was completed by the survey administrator and verified the identification of the person and the organization, and the location and contact information of the person who completed the survey. Part 2 was designed to capture the primary purpose of the social enterprise and their organizational and operational characteristics. Part 3 was designed to identify the nature of the goods and services sold by the social enterprise. Part 4 moved from the broad classification of goods and services to the more specific area of human resources. Part 5 dealt with financial information. Most community partners decided to add a Part 6, which consisted of questions dedicated to their circumstances and outreach, training and marketing strategies. In every survey, our community partners had the opportunity to modify any questions that could be misinterpreted due to regional cultural variations.

Survey launch

Two surveys were completed in 2010 in British Columbia and Alberta. A community partner in Alberta was not identified at this point in time, so the survey was conducted through the Institute for Nonprofit Studies (now the Institute for Community Prosperity) at Mount Royal University in Calgary. Preliminary survey results were reviewed by

Enterprising Non-Profits (BC) to identify potential anomalies in the data, to verify the analysis and to review how the results would be presented. At this time, there was no plan to extend the survey work beyond the terms of the initial SSHRC research grant. Or so we thought.

Community-led expansion

Because there was both a growing network of social enterprise advocates across Canada and a network of regional nodes of social economy researchers through the SSHRC project, our report on British Columbia and Alberta was circulated to other nodes and networks (Social Enterprise Council of Canada, 2018; The Canadian Community Economic Development Network, n.d.).

Manitoba was the first province to respond beyond the terms of our initial research mandate. Leadership within the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) office in Manitoba saw the social enterprise survey as a way to build on the foundation they had already established in community economic development. A province-wide survey was also an opportunity to foster a collective sense of the impact of social enterprises for both training and policy advocacy purposes. CCEDNet Manitoba asked for our assistance in developing a survey instrument and producing their own provincial report. We agreed, and over time a research agreement was signed and a partnership was formed.

This was our first attempt to provide support at a distance from our respective academic bases at Simon Fraser University (BC) and Mount Royal University (Alberta). As a result, we added CCEDNet Manitoba staff who would be survey partners to our research ethics agreement with our respective universities. We were also in a position to contribute limited financial support through the SSHRC CURA research project, which CCEDNet Manitoba was then able to leverage to receive additional support in order to conduct the survey. As opportunities to increase funding became available, the amount of funds transferred to the community partners also increased. For example, during the three years of funding from the Social Enterprise Canada (2013–16) that amounted to \$150,000 (CDN), \$75,000 was transferred to provincial community partners.

In what became the standard practice for working with provincial/territorial partners, the Manitoba project was implemented in three phases (see Table 1). In phase one, the structure and content of the mapping instrument was reviewed and survey briefing meetings took place with the community partners. In addition, we worked with our community partner to identify and contact existing social economy networks and social enterprises; this became the sample frame. In phase two, the survey was circulated to all identified social enterprises with the goal of achieving a large and fully representative sample of social enterprises in the province, and subsequently collected for data entry and analysis. In phase three, the survey results were circulated as widely as possible through both participant feedback and debriefing workshops with social-enterprise-related networks.

Table 1: SESS survey workflow

Pre-survey phase 6–8 weeks	Survey phase 6–8 weeks	Post-survey phase 6–8 weeks
The purpose of this phase is to generate the most complete and accurate contact list possible.	The purpose of this phase is to achieve the highest and most complete response rate possible.	The purpose of this phase is to create and present an accurate, timely and appealing profile of social enterprises.
Sign ethics MOU	Phone contacts	Verify data
Identify survey options (e.g. Fax/in person)	Send email with survey link	Data cleaning
Identify and verify supplementary questions	Follow-up, offer alternative response formats	Preliminary analysis
Solicit lists and letters of support	Verify and track responses	GIS mapping; determine options for regional reporting
Classify new and existing social enterprises	Contact and response coding	Final analysis
Verify existing lists and contacts	Response and report coding	Methodology update and feedback
Verify scheduling re survey release	Identify and announce deadline for completion	Draft report preparation
Ethics and survey orientation to surveyors	Allow a week after 'final' deadline for completion	Report verification and feedback
Generate survey link(s)	Complete sample realization report	Report finalization, printing, circulation

Source: Hall *et al.* (2016: 8)

Pre-survey phase

We worked with our partners in each province to develop a list of known social enterprises, enterprising non-profits and microenterprises. We mutually developed a list of potential social enterprise networks and social economy networks of which social enterprises were likely to be a part; identified forums, conferences and workshops associated with social enterprises that had taken place in the province in the previous year and identified leading proponents, supporters and participants. In addition, we mutually identified organizations, networks and institutions that identified themselves with social enterprises. The aforementioned organizations, networks and institutions were contacted to solicit their lists of social enterprises for inclusion in the sample frame for the questionnaire survey.

For research purposes, any social enterprise that was included in the sample had to meet the criteria of: (1) being incorporated as a non-profit business; (2) being a business venture that sells goods and services; and (3) being one that does so primarily in order to meet its social, cultural and/or environmental mission(s). While we were aware that the definition of a social enterprise was a contested arena, we were committed to having a clear operational definition (Teasdale *et al.*, 2013). A further selection criterion was that to be included, the social enterprise: (4) must be recognized

by one of our study partners (in this case, primarily the CCEDNet Manitoba office) as being a social enterprise. Research assistants, often university students hired by the community partner, called the potential respondents to verify that they met the criteria for a social enterprise. We regarded this process as an appropriate way to ensure that the definition of what constituted a social enterprise would be useful in practice. In this way, the compilation of the sample frame embodied CBR principles in both approach and intended outcome.

At the same time, as the contact list for survey purposes was being generated and verified, the survey itself was reviewed and updated. The community-based partner had the final decision on the timing of releasing the survey. They knew of events that might help or hinder the completion of the survey that were otherwise unknown to the co-researchers. Timing took into consideration access to summer student support, rural commitments to fall harvest season, First Nations approval processes, the potential of survey fatigue, and pre-existing organizational commitments. The community partners also had outstanding credibility with the target social enterprises, in contrast to the relatively unknown status of the co-researchers. The community-based organization, was the face of social enterprise in the province and a known proponent for the development of social enterprise.

Survey phase

At this point in the project, surveys were paper-based, and respondents could respond by email, fax, phone or mail. Students called respondents several times as a follow-up to an initial email solicitation. When convenient, the students recorded the survey information in a database. While the research ethics component of the survey was always included, the survey was distributed through the lead community-based partners, not the co-researchers. The surveyors were trained in survey protocols, issues of confidentiality and the importance of consistent follow-up strategies. For example, rigorous sampling protocols were established to minimize selection bias and follow-up survey contact protocol was consistent across all sub-populations.

In order to maximize our support for the provincial community partners, and to provide guidance in a timely fashion, weekly teleconference meetings were held. At these weekly meetings definitional, protocol and logistical issues were discussed at length.

Before we had launched the survey in Manitoba, we were approached by Common Good Solutions (<http://commongoodsolutions.ca/>) in Nova Scotia, itself Certified BCorp, to undertake a similar survey. The process outlined above was repeated with this new community-based partner in Nova Scotia, and other provinces soon followed (see Table 2). Once social enterprise intermediaries had completed one survey in their province, they were interested in replicating the survey on a biennial basis for several reasons. First, the landscape of social enterprises was changing rapidly, and the community partner wanted to capture that change. Second, there were planning and forecasting questions the community partner wanted to ask to plan their own activities. Third, they found that repeating the survey every two years was enough of a gap that respondent fatigue could be avoided.

Table 2: Social enterprise sector survey evolution timetable

Year		Event
2006–11 BC, Alberta Community University Research Alliance	2009	Pilot social enterprise survey (SFU class project)
	2010	First survey in BC and Alberta
	2011	First survey in Manitoba
	2011	First survey in Nova Scotia
2011–13 Funding received from Institute for Community Prosperity	2011	Survey moved online and translated into French
	2012	Second survey in BC and Alberta
	2012	First survey in New Brunswick
	2012	Bilingual SESS website launched http://sess.ca
2013–16 Survey funding received from Social Enterprise Canada	2013	First survey in Ontario
	2014	Second survey in Nova Scotia
	2014	Second survey in Manitoba
	2014	Second survey in New Brunswick
	2014	Third survey in BC and Alberta
	2014	First survey in PEI; Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut)
	2015	First survey in Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador
	2015	Second survey in Ontario
2016	Final national and provincial reports published	

Post-survey phase

Once the survey process was complete, the data were cleaned, analysed and presented in a basic template format (Hall *et al.*, 2014). Every province and territory was given several options regarding how the final report was to be generated. In the case of Manitoba, a basic template format for the data analysis and report data outputs was provided, and then CCEDNet Manitoba used that information on which to build and contextualize their own report. Several other provinces chose this option (Elson, Hall, Rowe *et al.*, 2016; Elson, Hall, Southcott *et al.*, 2016; Elson, Hall, Pearl *et al.*, 2015). Other provinces chose to circulate the template report as it was generated by the research team (Elson, Hall, Mann *et al.*, 2015; Elson, Hall and Wamucii, 2014).

A third option available to the provincial research partners was one in which the raw survey data was provided and the research partner generated their own data outputs, and, with research team oversight regarding the ethical handling of the data and scientifically rigorous presentation of the data, generated their own public report (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2015; Elson, Hall, Pronk and Wamucii, 2014; Flatt *et al.*, 2013).

When invited, and prior to producing a final report, a draft report would be workshopped with the host community partners and local funders. These workshops were extremely valuable as they highlighted the key issues and communication points

that were important to community partners. They also provided an opportunity to identify anomalies in the data analysis or presentation that were not previously observed by the research team. If it was not possible for the research team to be present, the community partner often undertook this review independently.

The workshops also gave the community partners a clear sense of ownership over the final report and a deeper appreciation for what was being accomplished. While there were variations in the form of the final survey report, community partners took time to create dedicated highlight reports with a range of focuses, circulate policy briefing notes and make community presentations. The co-researchers were also invited to present survey findings and observations at national and international social enterprise conferences and meetings.

Once the survey report was finalized and circulated, a comprehensive debriefing of the survey process, content and protocol was undertaken (O'Connor *et al.*, 2012). At this time, it became evident that it would be worthwhile to document the research and field survey process for use by potential community partners. A general procedural template was developed, and subsequently input was solicited and changes and additions from the community-based partner were incorporated into the manual (Hall *et al.*, 2016). This became an iterative process that was repeated following each survey, as even when the same organization was often involved, there was considerable staff turnover (see Table 3).

Table 3: Community partners

Province/Territory	Organization type	Community partner
British Columbia	Non-profit agency	ENP-BC (2009, 2010, 2012, 2014)
Alberta	Registered charity (Private foundation)	The Trico Charitable Foundation (2014)
Saskatchewan	Non-profit network	The Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership (2015)
Manitoba	Community economic development network	CCEDNet Manitoba (2012, 2014)
Ontario	Community economic development network	CCEDNet Ontario (2013, 2015)
New Brunswick	Co-operative network	Saint John Community Loan Fund/ Université de Moncton (2012) Co-operative Enterprise Council of New Brunswick (2014)
Nova Scotia	Community interest company	Common Good Solutions (2012, 2014)
PEI	Registered charity (Community foundation)	PEI Community Foundation (2015)
Newfoundland and Labrador	Non-profit agency	Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (2015)
Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut)	College/university	Yukon College/Lakehead University (2015)

Scaling up community-based research

The Canadian social enterprise surveys represent a scaling up of community-based research across four dimensions, namely, community partner connection, survey design, survey methodology and survey data.

Community partner connection

The community partners and social enterprise intermediaries initiated both the first surveys in British Columbia and Alberta, and the subsequent expansion of the provincial surveys. It was only after three years and the completion of eight surveys in six provinces that the possibility of a pan-Canadian survey strategy came to the fore. Again, the leads in this were the social enterprise partners. We connected with the provincial/community partner that saw themselves as having the interest and capacity to conduct the survey, and we had no pre-determined criteria in this regard. Some community partners were part of a network of enterprising non-profit (ENP) affiliates or the Canadian Social Enterprise Council of Canada, but this was not always the case (Social Enterprise Council of Canada, 2018).

Survey design

The survey, as previously noted, started out as a paper-based survey. In 2011, we moved to an online survey format to expedite survey distribution, completion and data analysis. The online survey format also provided an opportunity for custom-designed questions to be generated by community partners in each province and added to the survey. While not every partner chose to do so, many did. The core survey, replicated across all provinces and territories, focused on present activities and impact measurement. Instead, our community partners were interested in adding questions that helped to forecast the training, marketing, human resource and financial needs of social enterprises. This information was then used to plan training programmes, apply for funding and advance policy advocacy efforts.

The second major design change was to translate the complete survey, including online survey instructions, into French. This change was made to accommodate provinces with a significant population of francophone social enterprises. Once this initial accommodation was made in 2011, it became standard practice for all subsequent surveys.

The third design change in the survey was to make relatively minor, but contextually important changes to accommodate different cultures across provinces and territories. Without changing the intent or validity of any question, words were substituted to make the survey clearer to social enterprises within a given province. The community partners were key to identifying these necessary changes.

Survey methodology

While there was consistency across the provinces in the overall survey methodology, important variations were accommodated. The first is that there were populations of social enterprises in some provinces that did not exist in others. One example was agricultural societies. With more than 300 agricultural societies in Alberta, they are a significant presence in the social enterprise ecosystem. Steps were taken to reach out to this particular community; a dedicated link was embedded in the survey, and while this survey was being led by a social enterprise intermediary, the survey was distributed to agricultural societies through the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies.

In the Northern Territories, social enterprise is not as familiar a term as either a non-profit or social economy organization. Because of this, a broader sample than social enterprises were surveyed and then an analysis was conducted on the social enterprise subset. In another province, both for-profit and non-profit social enterprises were surveyed at the request of a survey funder, but only the non-profit social enterprises were included in the final research report.

These examples serve to illustrate that while the appropriate rigour associated with high-quality surveys was maintained, there was also space to accommodate variations across provinces as identified and requested by community partners.

Survey data

As the survey data started to accumulate over multiple provinces, a comparative template was produced, profiling key demographic, operational, structural and financial indicators of impact of the surveyed social enterprises. This comparative table was systematically expanded and included with each new report (Elson, Hall and Wamucii, 2016). When the survey project website was created in 2012, reports and surveys were posted on an ongoing basis (<http://sess.ca>). The website was also used to link to the survey database, and provide community partner contact information and PDF versions of the survey itself when the survey was underway. Deidentified microdata from the 2014/15 round of surveys has been made available to researchers, students and policymakers via the SFU institutional data repository (see <https://researchdata.sfu.ca/node/6>).

Challenges

Given the fact that this was an unanticipated scaling up of a community-based research project there were very few challenges. There were no significant challenges associated with working with any given community partner, as each was consistently enthusiastic about the survey and its potential to serve their particular interests and the Canadian social enterprise sector as a whole. The online survey was relatively error free and the developer of the survey software program collaborated fully with any desired formatting changes. The most significant challenge was the logistical coordination of as many as four simultaneous survey processes. It meant that careful attention needed to be paid to planning weekly update meetings, scheduling data analysis and report writing.

Discussion

This nationwide community-based research was the unintended consequence of conducting a limited social enterprise survey research project in partnership with a provincial practitioner and advocate for social enterprise. The community in this case was not individual local community members or individual social enterprises, but community-focused social enterprise intermediaries with a dedicated interest in fostering social enterprises within their particular jurisdiction. As shown in Table 4, there are ten recognized criteria for establishing a project as community-based research (Tandon *et al.*, 2016), to which we have added an eleventh.

Table 4: Community-based research assessment criteria

Parameter	Community-based research (CBR)	Evidence from this case study
1 Who are the researchers/ who conducts the research?	Community members with or without the involvement of a university	Community members reached out to university
2 What is the purpose of the research?	Contribute to the betterment of a particular community, social change, social justice	Desire to contribute to the betterment of the social enterprise community
3 Who is the research intended to serve?	The local community and the research community	The social enterprise community
4 Whose knowledge counts?	Both community members and researchers	Both community members and researchers
5 Who determines the topics to be researched?	Members of the local community themselves or in collaboration with researchers	Members of the community in collaboration with researchers
6 What is the rationale for choosing the research methodology?	Community empowerment and mutual learning	Community knowledge, network building, mutual learning and communication with policymakers
7 Who has ownership of the research results?	Community members alone or with researchers	Community members and researchers
8 What aspect of the research is emphasized?	Research process	Research process and meaningful results
9 Mode of presentation?	Varies widely	Variety of forms created by community partners
10 Means of dissemination?	Any and all forums	Media, policy briefings, community meetings, national and international conferences, journals, project and institutional website
11 Source of funding?	Community led or jointly with researchers and community	One year of university funding and five years of community funding

Source: Tandon *et al.* (2016), citing work of Strand *et al.* (2003: 9) and University of Delaware (2016). Item 11 added by the authors.

Set against these criteria, we argue that the Canadian social enterprise sector survey demonstrates success:

1. While initially the research was launched as part of a Community–University Research Alliance, it grew, over time, not at the insistence or initiation of the co-researchers, but at the request of intermediaries in the social enterprise community. In fact, we operated on the premise that we would not conduct our survey research in any province or territory unless we were explicitly invited to do so.

2. The purpose of the research, in the short term, was to contribute to the betterment of the social enterprise community, but ultimately was to foster economic and social justice.
3. The research served the local (provincial) community and secondarily the academic community by contributing to the body of research on social enterprises (Elson and Hall, 2012). At the local levels, this was facilitated through the addition of questions by provincial partners to the survey that were related to the community's informational needs that could be used to address local issues that might not be applicable to the national context. This research also contributes to the academic community by advancing a model that can be used for large-scale studies involving multiple stakeholders. In addition, this research provides access to data that could be used to advance scholarly work on social enterprises.
4. The research would not have been conducted independently of the community partners. Community partner knowledge of their needs, context and community was on a par with the researchers' research methods knowledge. This was evident in the networks provided by the affiliates, and their combined experience working in the social enterprise field enabled the survey to be distributed widely. There was a spirit and a genuine level of collaboration throughout the project, to the extent that the lead co-researchers became known as 'the two Peters', both within the project and beyond. The collaboration was also manifested through the significant amounts of time that the researchers and community affiliates dedicated to the research. Both researchers and community partners were involved in identifying challenges in the research process and generating interventions to resolve the challenges. This is consistent with the collaboration, democratization of knowledge and social change features profiled earlier.
5. The community partners collaborated in determining the research questions and took the lead in reaching out and engaging the target community.
6. The survey method chosen was, in part, designed to create impact indicators designed to allow the sector to communicate with policymakers and funders. At the same time, the iterative process of developing the research manual gave community partners the opportunity to learn about, reflect on and influence future research activities.
7. In all cases, while the community group shared the research results, there was a core focus on the integrity of the research process itself.
8. Also, while in all cases, the community group took the lead in disseminating the results in ways that reached their particular audiences, there was a core focus on the integrity of the research process itself.
9. Community partners posted survey results on their web pages.
10. Community partners put out media releases and held meetings with policymakers.

The provincial partners were strong and credible intermediary organizations before they engaged in this research process. This was a significant asset in building their internal research and survey capacity, identifying social enterprises, determining the timing of the survey and disseminating the survey results. Because the provincial partners had co-ownership of the survey report, they actively disseminated the final report and circulated it broadly, which in turn strengthened their own credibility with their social enterprise sector, the broader community and government. The custom questions generated by the provincial partners provided the opportunity for major issues facing social enterprises to be identified, provincially and nationally.

A significant by-product of the research was the value of the research for government, other provincial networks, and for other organizations that wanted to

promote social enterprise and policies that enable social enterprise development. For example, the survey information was used to inform the Nova Scotia provincial government during the creation of the *Social Enterprise Policy Pillars* and the *Nova Scotia Social Enterprise Strategy 2017* reports (Furey, 2017; Social Enterprise Network of Nova Scotia, 2017). Canada's federal government has used the survey data to help establish and fund a social enterprise research programme (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2016). In terms of the provincial governments, the survey results have been widely quoted by government officials and have supported the development of several provincial social enterprise policy frameworks (Advisory Committee on Social Enterprise and Community Investment Funds and Corporation, 2012; Government of Manitoba and Canadian Community Economic Development Network, 2015; Hubcap BC, n.d.; Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, 2013; Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, 2015).

Inserted as an eleventh item in Table 4, the source of funding can be a significant factor. Who applies for funding and who controls expenditures? In this case, the researchers and community partners applied for funding in the period 2010–11; the researchers solicited internal funding for the period 2012–13; and community social enterprise partners collectively applied for funding for the expansion and most significant scaling up that took place between 2013 and 2016. The trust and legitimacy built up over the first three years by the co-researchers continued throughout the remainder of the project.

In many ways this research reflects the 'democratization of knowledge' component associated with community-based research (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Kennedy *et al.*, 2011; Kapucu, 2016; Tandon *et al.*, 2016). This is evident in a number of ways. First, the study design resulted in wide-ranging information on the activities of social enterprises and their contributions in the economic, social/cultural and environmental spheres of society. This information has been widely distributed.

Second, the study design promoted capacity building community partners. Community members were able to hire students as research assistants, providing short-term work opportunities and experience for students. For example, in Nova Scotia, Common Good Solutions was able to hire five youths for the 2014 survey, increasing the knowledge and interest in social enterprise as a career option; three of them went on to work in social enterprises. In 2017, for their third survey, and with the assistance of employment grants, Common Good Solutions hired seven summer students to do the same work, plus conduct further research and make recommendations on the social enterprise policy created by and with the Nova Scotia government. This student experience has been instrumental in creating the next movement of social entrepreneurs in the sector.

Third, we provided support and training for community members in various stages of the research, including survey development, the analysis of data, survey report design and dissemination strategies. The researchers and community collaboratively documented the training process in a social enterprises survey guide, which has been used for subsequent community-based research (Hall *et al.*, 2016).

It is our view that the national social enterprise sector survey project has met all the criteria for being a genuine community-based research effort and has demonstrated that while community-based research can be local, these same principles can be successfully applied at scale.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that the core principles and strategies associated with community-based research do not have to be diluted as the scope and size of the research activity is scaled up. By continuing to focus on mutual beneficial and supportive relationships at the design, planning, implementation, reporting and dissemination phases of the research, much can be accomplished.

At every phase of the research, community partners had the opportunity to comment on, modify and 'own' the research process and outputs. As a case in point, one of the community partners is going to undertake their own independent provincial survey. This, we feel is a testament to the investment in educating community partners; building research strategies and methods within the partner community; and the empowerment that such a research process can bring to the community and researchers alike.

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