

Knowledge Transfer and Exchange Brief
Molly Morris, EDUC 7030, York University, June 2018

Purpose

- 1) Innovation York is a destination for York Faculty to receive Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) services and resources. It is up to Faculty to seek out these services that are so integral to the success of York's Strategic Research Plan. To significantly increase York's KMb activities may require embedding a culture of Knowledge Mobilization, which could be achieved through mandating the inclusion of KMb strategies in all appropriate research proposals developed by York Faculty and graduate students.
- 2) Innovation York's Annual Reports include data on the usage of its services and dollar value of KMb grant funding received. Absent in those reports is a quantification of how the implementation KMb has translated to research being used in policy and practice decisions by the community and industry research partners. The implementation of an embedded KMb strategy should include an evaluative component.

Background

York University's Strategic Research Plan for 2018-2023ⁱ emphasizes York's leadership in community-engaged research and articulates its commitment to "maximizing the benefits of that research for those communities (p28)." In support of that mandate, knowledge brokers within Innovation York's Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) Unitⁱⁱ, work to build partnerships between University researchers and community organizations, business and industry leaders, and policy professionals. In addition, the KMb team provides York's researchers with strategies and resources for including KMb in research grant applications.

Since its inception in 2006, the Knowledge Mobilization Unit has received 500 requests for collaboration, resulting in 175 KMb projects. Although the total amount of KMb funding received from grants by York researches has almost doubled from \$2.6 M to \$4.6 M in the past three years, the number of projects and number of Faculty engaged in KMb has declined. In 2015-2016 only 18 York Faculty were engaged in such projects through Innovation Yorkⁱⁱⁱ.

In a literature review of Knowledge Transfer and Exchange^{iv} (KTE, another commonly used name for Knowledge Mobilization), Mitton et al (2007, p. 741) determined that the availability of a mechanism for linking researchers to research users was the most important determiner of research utilization, and that the relationship between researchers and users was more important than the attributes of the research or research product itself. The availability of Innovation York to the University's research community bodes well then for uptake of KMb. And one should presume that more participation in KMb will result in more real-world research

application. That is good news according to a 2015 report on public policy measures in support of knowledge transfer activities^v in which Kochenova et al (2015, p. 407-408) described the benefits of a universities' ability to commercialize university research outcomes. These benefits include addressing social, cultural and environmental challenges; presenting a potential source of income for universities; strengthening reputation; and attracting quality students and researchers. In addition, these authors cited evidence (Kochenova et al, 2015, p. 416) that academic start-ups that engage in knowledge transfer activities that resulted in commercialization grants were more likely to receive follow-up venture capital funding.

The Institute for Work & Health, located in Toronto, has developed an organizational approach for the integration of KTE or KMb^{vi}. The authors cite studies that report that integrated KTE approaches involve “knowledge users as equal partners alongside researchers which will lead to research that is more relevant to, and more likely to be useful to the knowledge researchers (Van Eerd & Saunders, 2017, p. 2). However they all cite recent studies that show that organizations may not be fully adopting integrated KTE approaches. These same authors go on to discuss Canada’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council’s (SSHRC’s) inclusion of KMb in funding applications and their acknowledgment that it creates “positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and has the potential to enhance the profile, reach and impact of social science and humanities research” (Van Eerd & Saunders, 2017, p. 5). By extension, the enhanced profile benefit also impacts the institution’s reputation and recognition.

Measuring impact from KMb initiatives as an integral component of KMb strategies is emphasized in the research cited by both Mitton et al (2007) and Van Eerd and Saunders (2015). Mitton et al delineate three ways in which research knowledge may be utilized: instrumental knowledge that shapes policy and processes, conceptual use of knowledge to affect awareness and understanding of issues, and symbolic knowledge uses which supports existing policies. More recently, the Institute for Work and Health (Van Eerd & Saunders, 2017) described their efforts to quantify the reach and impact of their research through measurement available from digital activity including website visits, subscriptions and downloads.

Considerations

Achieving a culture of Knowledge Mobilization at York University through embedded KMb strategies in all research will come with a number of challenges that will require increased resources to address. In addition to the resources required to support a significant increase in Faculty use of Innovation York to support their KMb initiatives, Kochenkova et al (2015, p.424) caution about the danger of potential overlap among programs and schemes competing simultaneously for limited resources. This may also extend to competition for a limited number of community research partners.

An additional challenge of KMb, identified by Willison and Macleod (199, cited by Mitton et al, 2007, p. 738) is that researchers often have longer timelines for concluding research projects

than policy makers have for addressing needs. If a culture of KMb is to be pursued, then encouraging the inclusion of short-term objectives in research proposals to better engage stakeholders, as suggested by Willison and Macleod, may need to be undertaken.

Conclusion

York University is already a leader in Knowledge Mobilization in Canada, with a robust Innovation York team supporting KMb activities leading to commercialization and entrepreneurship. Embedding KMb in all research proposals, with quantifiable evaluation, supported by increased resources through Innovation York, will further proliferate York's leading reputation, potentially bring new revenue to research teams and the university, and attract the highest quality Faculty and students.

ⁱ <http://research.info.yorku.ca/files/2018/05/Final-SRP-2018-2023.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://innovationyork.ca/knowledge-mobilization/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://iy.info.yorku.ca/files/2017/05/2015-2016-KMb-at-YorkU-Annual-Report.pdf>

^{iv} Mitton, C., Adair, C., McKenzie, E., Patten, S., & Perry, B. (2007). Knowledge Transfer and Exchange: Review and Synthesis of the Literature. *Milbank Quarterly*, 85(4), 729-768.

^v Kochenkova, A., Grimaldi, R., & Munari, F. (2015). Public policy measures in support of knowledge transfer activities: a review of academic literature. *The Journal Of Technology Transfer*, 41(3), 407-429.

^{vi} Van Eerd, D., & Saunders, R. (2017). Integrated Knowledge Transfer and Exchange: An Organizational Approach for Stakeholder Engagement and Communications. *Scholarly And Research Communications*, 8(1), 1-18.