

Research for, with, and by Northern Society: Community Based Research in the North

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This session – hosted by the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies and the Canadian Polar Commission – dealt with relationships between communities and researchers in the North, sources of conflict between the two groups, ways in which the relationship can be managed, and how communities can be meaningfully engaged in decision making. The speakers represented a variety of groups: academia (Karen Young from York University), students (Jackie Price from University of Victoria), and indigenous organizations (Patricia Cochran of the Alaska Native Science Commission, and Noeline Villebrun, Dene national chief).

The session began with a welcoming speech by the Dene national chief, Noeline Villebrun. She emphasized the importance of research with, and by, indigenous communities to develop knowledge to improve living conditions, and for the purposes of lobbying to change policy. Using three examples of research projects in which the Dene Nation have been involved (the Northern Contaminants Project, the First Nations Health Survey, and the Community University Research Alliances), she argued that research should be conducted in a collaborative and respectful manner in which communities take a lead role, greater effort should be taken to ensure responsible research, and greater emphasis should be placed on building local capacity in communities to conduct research themselves.

Karen Young, of York University, reflected on her personal experiences of research in the Arctic and the difficulties of involving

communities. She stressed that employing locals in research is essential: it helps to build

friendships, develop mutual respect, and facilitates the sharing of knowledge. Developing such relationships, however, can be problematic and she highlighted the following problems that have limited such involvement in her research:

- Limited funding for employing local people. Funding agencies usually require the employment of university students
- The difficulty of reporting back to communities on research findings given that funding doesn't usually allow time for this
- The difficulties faced by researchers spending long period away from family

In response to these problems Karen argued for:

- More money, specifically targeted for involving communities and for involving northern students in the research
- More collaboration between researchers and northern colleges
- The need to allocate more time in research projects for engaging communities

Patricia Cochran, of the Alaska Native Science Commission, talked about the mission, purpose and goals of the Science Commission' focusing on how the Commission seeks to foster links between communities and researchers, and how they seek to encourage research that is led by communities. The Commission was set up in response to research that was having detrimental impacts on

communities. It has taken on the role of encouraging and facilitating research that is community led and that involves actively community members undertaking the research. The Commission also seeks to improve and facilitate the relationship between researchers and communities and ensure that researchers consider the ethical dimensions of their research.

The session finished with a presentation by Jackie Price, Masters Student at the University of Victoria, discussing a new community engagement model by which Inuit communities in Nunavut can become meaningfully engaged in decision making. She argued that there is an increasing realization among *Nunavumiut* (Inuit of Nunavut Territory, Canada) that the Nunavut Lands Claim Agreement is not working for them. While communities are consulted on a variety of issues and with regards to a variety of policies, Jackie argued that consultation, while well intentioned, is not meaningful. In her own words, “Our [Inuit] ability to make our own decisions was taken away from us, we must now take it back.” Following on from this, the main focus of the research is to identify what meaningful consultation would look like to Inuit and how this would be achieved. She proposed a ‘kitchen consultation model’ which requires that each community takes responsibility for consultation. The model involves:

- Communities deciding whether consultation is necessary
- Community identification of who must be consulted and if a public meeting is required
- Community control of the nature, timing, and location of subsequent discussion

In conclusion, a number of key themes emerged in the presentations and discussion that followed. Firstly, Aboriginal communities support research done in their communities but it must be undertaken in collaboration with them, and in a respectful and responsible manner. The involvement of community members should be more than just token: they should be key players both in research design, implementation, and in deciding to what ends the research findings are used. Youth, in particular, should be actively engaged in research projects. Secondly, research should seek to address issues and concerns that are important to communities, not just to researchers. Thirdly, community-led research, in which communities take a lead role in identifying what needs to be researched and determining how the research progresses, should be more actively promoted. Finally, there needs to be funding to allow researchers to more actively involve communities and achieve the above.