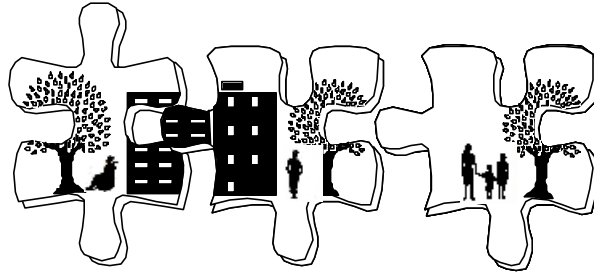




# **Winnipeg Inner- city Research Alliance:**



## **Lessons in Collaboration**

**Presentation for Cuexpo, May 8-10 2003, Saskatoon**

**Thursday, May 8, 2003**

**11:00 A.M.**

**Session A3 in the Salon Batoche**

**Presenters:**

**Dr. Tom Carter, Research Liaison Director, WIRA**  
**Anita Friesen, Community Liaison Director, WIRA**

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**PRESENTATION CUEXPO,  
SASKATOON, MAY 2003  
TOM CARTER AND ANITA FRIESEN**

**Overhead #1...Winnipeg Inner-city Research Alliance: Lessons in Collaboration**

**Overhead #2...**

**Origins of WIRA**

- for more than a decade there has been a loose coalition of community workers and academics with an interest in inner city research who coalesced around the Institute of Urban Studies.

- the basis for this loose coalition was a mutual concern about conditions in Winnipeg's inner city and a desire to engage in research and community building activities that would address the significant area of physical decline and the many social problems.

- the group came together in a more formal manner in 1998 in response to widespread arson, large scale abandonment of dwellings, gang activity and extreme poverty - certainly a low point in the history of Winnipeg's inner city.

- a decision was made to pursue funding to undertake initiatives (research, community development and capacity building) to try and address the difficult circumstances in the inner city and improve the quality of life of residents.

- this led to the application under the CURA program.

### Overhead #3

#### **Organizational Structure**

Three major components:

1. the *Executive Steering Committee* (ESC);
2. the *Community Liaison Director* (CLD); and
3. the *Research Liaison Director* (RLD).

#### *The Executive Steering Committee*

- the governing body of WIRA
- establishes research strategies and direction
- adjudicates research proposals;
- assists in monitoring of research projects;
- contributes to planning of public consultations, workshops
- reviews dissemination of research findings;
- liaises with other levels of government and community partners;

#### *Liaison Directors*

- ensure widespread familiarity of WIRA within the community and academic arenas;
- through extensive community consultation, help develop research strategies
- bring together community organizations and academics to form strong research partnerships;
- assist partners in the development of research projects;
- facilitate broader community support for research proposals
- provide ongoing guidance to partners throughout the research process;
- ensure maximum community impact and dissemination of research findings; and,
- act in an advisory capacity to the Executive Steering Committee.

#### *Research Liaison Director*

- function as Principal Investigator of the CURA grant: an administrative function.
- liaison and networking with academics.
- liaison with funders and university officials.

#### *Community Liaison Director*

- encourages groups, organizations and individuals in the community to come forward with ideas for research
- communicates the value of community involvement, describes potential benefits,
- demystifies and explains the research process.
- Maintains frequent contact with the community partners

*Institute of Urban Studies* (research institute affiliated with the University of Winnipeg)  
- provides administrative support

*Research Partners*: diverse group of academic and community partners  
- a broad base of research disciplines from the academic community  
- a wealth of practical experience from community based organizations  
- program and policy expertise from governments.

#### **Overhead #4**

### **Challenges**

#### **1. Definition of Community**

- considerable difference of opinion on who is community.
- traditional definition: neighbourhood based, non-profit, non-government.
- our research under CURA dictates the need for a broader definition as projects require more stakeholders at the table.
- definition has been expanded to include agencies from all levels of government, school divisions, private sector organizations, police department, etc.
- has created some tension but expanded stakeholder representation has brought more interested parties to the table, improved networking and increased funding to some of the projects.

#### **2. Academic Rigour vs Community Approach**

- academic rigour is less important to community than it is to funders and academics.
- community more interested in influencing government, policy people, politicians.
- more interested in media coverage and documents that take a specific point of view.
- the political message is crucial to community.
- some academics more interested in products suitable for academic journals.
- have achieved a reasonable balance and producing two types of products: journal articles, news tabloids, research highlights, also news releases, presentations to policy people, community meetings where politicians are invited, etc.

#### **3. Advocacy vs Research**

- community more interested in research from an advocacy perspective.
- some academics more interested in peer review, sound methodologies, etc.
- has created some tension in project partnerships.
- also some concern from policy people at the government level.
- if you are engaged in community based research it is difficult to take advocacy out of the equation. Community wants to use research products to “make the case”
- address this with two types of products noted above.
- we content that advocacy and research are nor mutually exclusive. Good quality academic research with sound methodology can be a powerful advocacy tool.

#### 4. The Process Takes Time

- building partnerships to undertake projects takes a great deal of time.
- developing consensus within the project group is also time consuming.
- multiple stakeholders at the table adds to the time required to build consensus.
- just developing a questionnaire can be a very time consuming process, not to mention agreement on the wording of the final report.
- this is a “new experience” for some academics and can be a frustration process.
- the process has been far more time consuming than we anticipated. It has taken us much longer to get to the final product stage than anticipated.
- taking the time to build consensus and develop strong partnerships has yielded better results.

#### **(Overhead #4 Challenges, continued)**

#### 5. Obtaining and maintaining balanced participation

- often the lion's share of the research is undertaken by the academic partner because
  - 1) community partners often have other priorities that demand time,
  - 2) academic partners have research expertise
  - 3)it takes time to transfer research skills
- partnership often begins with a perceived power imbalance which can continue unless deliberate effort is invested into leveling the imbalance.

#### 6. Small p politics

- pre-established relationships/reputations can often be the strongest factor in development of partnerships.
- are the unwritten, unspoken criteria in project adjudication
- Understanding these dynamics is crucial
- not understanding can result in unforeseeable results

#### **Overhead #5**

##### **Successes - *Narrowing the divide***

1. Community members gain increased confidence in their unique knowledge and build research skills, increased capacity;
2. Academic partners connect theory with real-life experience and gain skills in community-based research techniques.
3. Partnerships have extended beyond the WIRA project to other initiatives
4. Academics are recognizing the credibility of community-based research

## **Overhead #6**

### **Outcomes**

- funded just over 20 projects since receiving the grant.
- focus has been on three theme areas: social development (Aboriginal, youth and educational issues); community economic development and housing.
- education and training has been enhanced by our Summer Institute for students and community workers.
- six publications to-date with several more in final stages of completion.
- projects to date have employed 44 students (undergraduate and graduate).
- 70 community research assistants.
- involved approximately 30 academics and 27 community practitioners in research projects.
- skills development including: interview techniques, oral and written communication, organizational skills, data collection and analysis, planning and facilitation focus groups, field observation, teamwork, leadership, community liaison and mentorship.
- community capacity building: The Rooming House Study led to the development of a Rooming House Tenants Association, empowering tenants and enabling them to take action collectively to improve their housing circumstances.
- influencing policy: Building On Our Strengths: Inner City Priorities for a Renewed Tri-Level Development Agreement; This broad based community consultation has been instrumental in influencing the nature of the new tri-partite Memorandum of Understanding that has recently been signed and will lead to funding for renewed renewal initiatives in Winnipeg's inner-city.
- development of community resources: Tenant and Landlord Cooperation: Guide to Good management of Inner City Buildings for Landlords and Tenants; a resource and educational tool for both landlords and tenants, and a reference guide for other services available for both groups.
- curriculum development: Aboriginal Education in Winnipeg's Inner City High Schools; has led to a review of school curriculum.
- mentoring: Mentoring Inner City Youth In Transition to Independent Living; Mentors are receiving education on issues of relevance to inner city youth ranging from how to develop talents and achieve real-life skills, to violence and bullying. Youth who are being mentored are benefiting from enhanced problem solving, life-skills development, improved self awareness, and more effective coping strategies in dealing with life and its problems in the inner city.
- potential to monitor change: Quality of Life Indicators, Community Resource and Best

Practices Data Base, Housing GIS Data Base.

- spawning of secondary research initiatives.

### **Overhead #7**

#### **Lessons Learned**

- Time and energy intensive
- From the outset, clarity is important in the purpose, research objectives, mandate
- Structure and processes need to be kept simple and straightforward
- Maintain flexibility to accommodate unique circumstances
- Difficult to reach community and secure their involvement
- Priorities change rapidly, therefore, there is a need to revisit strategies and objectives on a regular basis