Mobilizing Knowledge for Better Public Policy: Lessons from the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development, Memorial University

Rob Greenwood, Ph.D.

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Lessons from a Provincial Government Policy Wonk (1)

- Policy Shops are the easiest to cut – not direct delivery to client
- Policy cuts have long-term impacts
- Restoring policy to feed “rule by auditor” and do briefing notes isn’t restoring policy
- Significant knowledge resides outside government: why not tap into it?
Lessons from a Provincial Government Policy Wonk (2)

• Better policy when developed collaboratively
  ➢ across departments
  ➢ with external partners: industry; community; other governments; university

• ...and better chance of continuity
• Collaboration has to be resourced
• Requires brokers / safe spaces
Memorial University

- Only university in NL
- “Special Obligation” to People of NL
- History of Regional Engagement
- Harris Centre established October 2004
Harris Centre Mandate

• Coordinate and Facilitate the University’s Activities Relating to Regional Policy and Development
• Advise on Building the University’s Capacity
• Identify Priority Themes and Projects relating to:
  • Teaching
  • Research
  • Outreach
• Emerging Role: Honest Broker
The Harris Centre aspires to live up to the reputation of Leslie Harris, in whose honour the Centre is named:

- Integrity
- Independence
- Transparency
- Collaboration
- Practical Application
2010-2011 Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Research
Stimulate more research in regional policy and development

Goal 2: Education
Stimulate education in regional policy and development at Memorial University

Goal 3: Outreach
Generate greater interaction of Memorial University faculty, students and staff with stakeholder needs and opportunities

Goal 4: Capacity
Establish Memorial University as a recognized centre of excellence in regional policy and development

Goal 5: Operations
Establish Harris Centre operations for long-term success
Harris Centre: Key Programs and Services

- Public Forums
- Conferences
- Invitation-only Sessions
- Targeted Research Funding
- Graduate Student Knowledge Exchange
- Packaging Research to Meet Needs
- Regional Workshops
- Yaffle.ca
Regional Workshops

Memorial University research and outreach projects by Economic Zone

X = current projects per zone(s) at time of workshop
A ‘marketplace’ for information

**DEMAND**
- Regional Workshops
- Regional Councils
- Individual Submissions

**SUPPLY**
- Lay Summaries
- Book of Experts
- Research Directory
- Other Sources
- Other Sources
Memorial’s Faculty of Business Administration approached the Crosbie group of Companies approaches Dean of Business for possible researcher.

November 2004
### Meeting with Harris Centre

**Dean of Business**

arranges meeting with the Harris Centre

**November 2004**

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**Memorial’s Faculty of Business Administration**

Approached

Crosbie group of Companies approaches Dean of Business for possible researcher

**November 2004**
Memorial’s Faculty of Business Administration approaches Dean of Business for possible researcher.

Dean of Business arranges meeting with the Harris Centre.

Researchers identified:

The Harris Centre confirms Dr. James Feehan and researcher Alison Coffin to conduct research on the federal presence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Harris Centre and the Crosbie Group partner to fund the research.

May 2005
Partnering with the Private Sector for Independent Policy Research
The Federal Presence in Newfoundland and Labrador

Memorial’s Faculty of Business Administration
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Meeting with Dean of Business arranges meeting with the Harris Centre

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Independent Report released

Dr. Feehan and Ms. Coffin release the Federal presence study

November 2004

November 2005
Partnering with the Private Sector for Independent Policy Research
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Meeting with

Researchers identified

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November 2004

Report findings inform public debate

• Federal Treasury Board President responds

• Provincial Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs issues a Ministerial Statement in House.

• City of St. John’s all Candidates debate (federal election January 2006) addresses questions from Dr. Feehan

• Premier’s letter to federal leaders cites “independent confirmation” of Harris Centre study

November 2005 - January 2006
Partnering with the Private Sector for Independent Policy Research

The Federal Presence in Newfoundland and Labrador

Further Research

- Dr. Feehan and Ms. Coffin are awarded funding for Phase II report from the Harris Centre Applied Research Fund

February 2006

- Federal Presence Phase II Report

Summer 2006
Partnering with the Private Sector for Independent Policy Research
The Federal Presence in Newfoundland and Labrador

**Memorial’s Faculty of Business Administration Approached**
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November 2004

**Meeting with Harris Centre**
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November 2004

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**Report findings inform public debate**
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November 2005 - January 2006

**Further Research**
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February 2006
- Federal Presence Phase II Report
Summer 2006
Key Challenges

- Building the brand: inside and outside the university
- Faculty rewards for promotion and tenure
- Focus; “not lose sight of the mundane whilst chasing the exciting” (Newcastle U., June 2009)
- Maintaining independence while brokering projects requiring funding
- Patience, taking the High Road when dealing with university politics / posturing
- Don’t over estimate capacity of community / NGOs / business / government, to engage
- Responding to demand; managing flow
The Harris Centre as Broker (1)

- Knowledge Brokering Mirrors Marketing Function - Need to Identify 3 Components:
  - Demand: research, teaching, outreach “pull”
  - Supply: Memorial capacity to deliver; “push”
  - Champions: make it happen

- Clarify roles: Lead / Partner / Support
- Clarify commitments and implementation
  - Contract Management / Project Management
  - Monitoring and Evaluation

- Communicate!

- Integrity & Independence of the University Key
The Harris Centre as Broker (2)

• Honest Broker role
  ➢ Not a policy advocate
  ➢ Not a think tank
  ➢ Independent moderator / facilitator

• Knowledge Mobilization
  ➢ Research management, promotion, communications
  ➢ Continuum: Inside out / Outside in / Co-production
Knowledge Mobilization:

Harris Centre Perspective

1. Contribute to informed public debate; build democratic efficacy; create and apply knowledge
2. Engage stakeholders to define issues / needs / opportunities
3. Involve partners in knowledge generation
4. Ground-truth findings
5. Identify champions
6. Build awareness (Memorial, research, faculty, students)
7. Intermediary: linking policy makers & practitioners with faculty, students and staff
8. Building long-term relationships: creating & fostering networks (it's about people!)
9. Strategic Communications
10. Evidence-informed decision making
Long-term outcomes?

- Better public policy and governance
- Greater democratic efficacy
- Informed Public Debate
- Scholarship of Engagement
- Learning Region(s)
- Culture of Innovation

...and it’s fun to do!
Comments? Questions? Opportunities for new partnerships?