Four Major Considerations when Conducting Community-Engaged Research
(Written by Tamara Burch, Research Assistant)

When conducting scholarly research, the term "community engagement" seems straight-forward enough, but if you are looking to truly reach the heart of the community you're engaging with, it may not be as easy as the term suggests.

Laurence D.Dubuc, Ph.D, conducted two roundtable sessions with forthcoming and perceptive members of local arts organizations, effectively discussing community engagement while performing community engagement (Community-engaged research led by the sector for the sector). During these sessions, some points repeatedly came up.

1. *Building relationships takes time*.

   One of the most important strategies for effective community engagement is to work at the speed of trust. Building trust with a community takes effort, and it is essential to form, nurture, and engage relationships with the community. This can be a challenging and time-consuming process, and it is important to manage expectations and be prepared for it to take longer than expected.

2. *Barriers to accessibility are a vital consideration when conducting community engaged research*.

   Continually ensuring that our research is carried out with equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) at top of mind is paramount to the success and quality of the information that is uncovered.
   - Language is a big concern – if we're conducting community engaged research, we need to make sure we're using the language of the community. Even the language from the research presentations that launched this roundtable event was often too academic to follow.
   - Buildings are another concern – for example, government buildings offer free programming, but not everyone feels comfortable going there. There can also be barriers of hierarchy between funders, artists, and academics, and it can create a power imbalance that should be taken into consideration when conducting community engaged research.
   - Barriers of geography should not be overlooked since it has been found that simply trying to bring Edmontonians from both north and south of the river together can often be a challenging task.

3. *The structure of the sessions can be used as a strategy to obtain the most effective community engagement possible.*

   Consider how the meetings are held: are they one-on-one, zoom, or group meetings? Can the concept of a circle, campfire, or ceremony be used as these are universally understood types of gatherings that can be made as informal or as formal as deemed

appropriate? It is also important to consider how deep we must go to reach our goals of research. Is one gathering enough? Should there be multiple? The arts sector is creative and we should remember that we can bring creativity to our methods of conducting research.

4. *When it comes to sharing our findings, it is important to have a commitment to share right from the outset of our research.*

We should consider the methods of sharing our findings so that they are distributed in ways that are useful and accessible to the community. This could include anything visual—dance, music, visual arts, video, theatre—as these make a powerful impact, but it is important to consider how we can ensure that the information is still accessible for everyone.

Community engagement is an important aspect of conducting research, as it allows for the inclusion and participation of the communities affected by the research. However, engaging with the community can be a complex and nuanced process that requires careful planning and execution. Before conducting community engaged research of your own, consider answering some of the questions that came up during this roundtable event, such as how do we define community and what makes a good community engaged project? These questions can help to guide our research and ensure that we are engaging with the community in an effective and meaningful way.