‘Making Research Accessible in the Downtown Eastside’ Initiative

Description, Guiding Principles and Actions

Updated October 2018

Background and purpose
What is the ‘Making Research Accessible’ initiative (MRAi)? The MRAi is a campus-community collaboration led by the UBC Learning Exchange that seeks to improve access to academic research and community-generated materials with a focus on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). The need to access high-quality research and information was brought to the attention of the Learning Exchange by people living and working in the DTES. These groups voiced their concern with research projects that extracted information and findings that were locked behind publisher paywalls. Members of community organizations also identified the need to preserve community-generated materials.

The MRAi’s intended outcomes are to 1. Increase the accessibility and impact of research by facilitating: open-access to research materials, the development of plain-language summaries, and opportunities to share information and learn from one another (i.e. knowledge mobilization), and 2. Increase the recognition and availability of community-generated materials such as program reports, research and evaluation documents, and organizational histories.

Housed at the Learning Exchange, the MRAi is a partnership with UBC Library, the Public Scholars Initiative (PSI) and various stakeholders in the DTES. The MRAi is pursuing several avenues for disseminating research focused on the DTES, including an online and open access information repository that contains academic research and community-generated materials. An online repository will contribute to knowledge transfer initiatives by making these resources available to agencies and individuals in and beyond the DTES. The MRAi also works to facilitate opportunities for faculty members, community organizations, students, community members, and other stakeholders to learn from and collaborate with one another. Through developing a wider platform to share the findings from research and community-generated materials, and facilitating the uptake of this information in the context of the DTES, we hope to broaden the positive impact of evidence-based information in people’s lives.

Goals of the initiative
The MRA initiative has five broad goals.

1. Collect and preserve in-scope materials about the DTES in UBC’s open access repositories to share community-generated work and academic, peer-reviewed publications.
2. Facilitate open access to materials about the DTES.
3. Leverage the collection to improve knowledge exchange and support knowledge translation.
4. Facilitate communication and collaboration between stakeholders to encourage accessible and responsible research practices in the DTES.
5. Promote interdisciplinary communication and collaboration to break down research silos.
Guiding principles
- We believe in open access to information.
- We promote interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration.
- We recognize that this work is messy, and encourage transparent and respectful communication practices that address issues as they arise.
- We acknowledge that the MRAi is an emerging and consultative project where we are continually gaining clarity about what is/is not achievable or in-scope.
- We encourage researchers to consider using existing data and materials before collecting new information.
- We aim to promote a culture shift in how research is organized and conducted in the DTES.

Outcomes and Benefits of the MRAi
Benefits to DTES Communities:
- Support campus-community collaboration and opportunities to share information and learn from one another (i.e. knowledge mobilization).
- Increase the visibility and usefulness of high quality research that has already been conducted, while reducing the burden on research participants and meeting some of their information needs.
- Provide community members with access to academic research and community materials they helped create, and work with them to identify opportunities to increase the impact of this information.
- Provide flexible income generating opportunities, paid training and learning opportunities to peer researchers.
- Provide organizations and service providers with access to resources for grant applications and program development.

Benefits to UBC Campus Communities:
- Support campus-community collaboration and opportunities to share information and learn from one another (i.e. knowledge mobilization).
- Undertake processes to support the development of plain-language summaries.
- Improve access to information collected by organizations working in the DTES.
- Work to develop processes for digitization off-campus.
- Strengthen collaborative networks with organizations outside of the campus community.
- Work across departments within the university and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g. organizing faculty forum on MRAi).
- Provide students, faculty and researchers with access to data and orienting materials that may offer alternative views of the DTES and inspiration for collaborative community based work.
- Curate publicly available resources for orienting new staff, students, and academics to the neighbourhood.

Scope of the MRAi information repository
- Focus on the DTES
- Online and physical repositories will include peer-reviewed journal articles, PhD dissertations, data sets, and community-generated publications
- Areas of special interest include mental health, HIV/AIDS, issues related to food security, housing and sustainability (identified by community organizations)
- Special care for at-risk materials (e.g., materials currently only available in print, unpublished data sets)
- Academic materials will focus on UBC-generated research
- Focus on material published since 2010.

**UBC Learning Exchange as MRAi Lead**
- Positioned in both the UBC and DTES communities, and connected to staff, students, and faculty members at the university, and to organizations and residents in the DTES
- Guided by place- and strengths-based approaches to community development
- Committed to ethical research practices
- All programming and activities are rooted in the idea of ‘learning exchanges,’ where everyone has something to learn and something to share.

**Stakeholders (not listed in order of importance)**
- UBC Learning Exchange
- UBC Library
- Carnegie Community Centre
- Vancouver Public Library
- DTES community members, including research participants
- UBC Public Scholars Initiative
- UBC Community Engagement Office
- UBC faculty and staff researchers
- UBC students volunteering or conducting community-based research in the neighbourhood
- Students and faculty from SFU and other higher education providers with an interest in the DTES
- Community organizations and service providers, including community centres, Neighbourhood Houses, newcomer-serving agencies, health, housing and economic organizations, municipal government, and philanthropic and non-profit foundations

**Steering Committee**
The Steering Committee members (as of October 2018) are:
- Angela Towle, Academic Director, UBC Learning Exchange
- Heather De Forest, Community Scholars Librarian, SFU
- Zachary Foote, iSchool Co-op student
- Heather Holroyd, Community-Based Research Coordinator, UBC Learning Exchange
- Julie Jenkins, Engagement Strategist, UBC Community Engagement Office
- Stephanie Kripps, Vancouver Public Library nāc̓aʔmat ct Strathcona Branch
- Kathleen Leahy, Director, UBC Learning Exchange
- Kristina McDavid, Executive Director COPPUL
- Aleha McCauley, Community Engagement Librarian, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre
- Heather O’Brien, Associate Professor, iSchool, UBC
- Wanda Power, Graduate Research Assistant, Learning Exchange
- Gordon Yusko, Assistant Director Community Engagement, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (ex-officio)

The Steering Committee consults with stakeholders to guide the MRAi’s direction and activities.
Work Plan Priorities for 2018

1. **The Information Hub**
   A priority for 2018 is to improve the organization, sophistication, and diversity of information on the Info Hub website.
   
   i. Ensure materials are being added to circle and the Info Hub on a regular basis.
   ii. Apply feedback from the focus group with DTES residents to the Info Hub website.
   iii. Organize a focus group with community leaders and organizations to gather more feedback.
   iv. Work with DTES researchers to pilot the creation of researcher videos and evaluate usefulness for the community.
   v. Decide whether to include a ’Research-in-Process’ section to inform people about upcoming/current projects.
   vi. Revisit the name of the website to make sure it accurately reflects content and intent. Is Information Hub the right name? Should it be 'Research Hub’?
   vii. Beyond the Info Hub as a repository, conduct pilots of the hub for knowledge exchange – a digital space for community and researchers to get together.
   viii. Plan a series of soft launches of the website over the next 6-8 months

2. **Community Engagement**
   a. Sustain the Digitizing Community Memories (DCM) Project
      i. Develop a plan for the collection and digitization of community materials (spreadsheet of archives, records; decide about materials other than print).
      ii. Engage with the Community Scholars program led by Heather DeForest (SFU) as another way to engage community organizations and identify community generated materials.
   b. Increase representation from the DTES community on the Steering Committee.
   c. Consider ways to engage community members other than being on the committee: e.g. making minutes from meetings available, inviting comment on the minutes to encourage active involvement in the goals of the MRAi.

3. **Emerging or New Developments (for further discussion)**
   a. Develop a set of guiding principles and processes to evaluate and disseminate our work that includes strong community input.
   b. Begin working on the potential impacts of the MRAi and how we could measure them.
   c. Plan knowledge mobilization events conducted/supported by the MRAi.
   d. Explore tensions between open access to information in relation to the respect for people’s rights to privacy and confidentiality and indigenous approaches to sharing and implications for our work.
   e. Work with BREB to develop more stringent requirements for ethical research in the DTES and create materials for researchers.