Making Research More Accessible in the Downtown Eastside...

Making research related to Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) accessible is both complex and impactful. This initiative requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between key factors, such as community goals, research ethics, academic career advancement, and scholarly publishing systems. Despite disruptions in recent years due to the global pandemic, the Making Research Accessible (MRAi) in the DTES initiative is making steady progress in a variety of interrelated areas.

Some examples:

• The Downtown Eastside Research Access Portal (DTES RAP), launched in March 2020, now links to more than 1,700 items, including work published outside UBC and important work created by community researchers, organizations and community members. The MRAi team works with creators to preserve their materials in UBC’s open access repository (cIRcle) or links to them externally—making the portal a go-to location for DTES-related research.

• Despite the abundance of research related to the Downtown Eastside, UBC’s open access repository (cIRcle) had only 40 items tagged with “Downtown Eastside” when the MRAi first began in 2015—a sign of how difficult it can be to find research related to one of the most researched communities in Canada. The repository now has 615 tagged items that are also now easily found via the Downtown Eastside Research Access Portal.

This report highlights these and other examples of how the MRAi supports community goals, research impact, student learning and scholarship. Except where noted, it spans March 2020—the date the DTES RAP launched—to March 2023.

...is a Collaborative Effort

The MRAi team continues to bring together people from across the university and community to identify new goals and opportunities, and to collaborate on novel ways to make research accessible using formats like podcasts and infographics.

The purpose of this report is to celebrate the progress so far, to sincerely thank all of our partners for being a part of this important initiative, and to recommit to the work.

There’s a long way to go but, as we hope this report shows, change happens when we work and learn from each other.

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the work of the MRAi is situated on the traditional territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Óxwumíxw (Squamish) and səl̓ilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh).
In 2021, the British Columbia Library Association (BCLA) awarded the MRAi Steering Committee its prestigious Eureka Award, given to projects that bring an “innovative approach to address a barrier.” This recognition implicitly extends to all our partners, who make this work possible.

Spotlight: BCLA Award

In Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, new research holds great promise but also demands time, resources, and capacity from communities with lived experience. Academic research is often publicly funded yet is published in journals that require paid access and often uses language that is hard to understand. “Researched to death with little to show” is a common sentiment. At the same time, researchers want their work to support community goals and be available so that their efforts have maximum positive impact.

This was some of the feedback the UBC Learning Exchange heard when it started asking what role it could play in facilitating research efforts between UBC and the Downtown Eastside. The Learning Exchange is a UBC hub in the Downtown Eastside designed to support the university and community to learn from each other.

The Learning Exchange connected with the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC) at UBC Library to assemble a steering committee dedicated to making research related to the Downtown Eastside more accessible. This became the Making Research Accessible in the Downtown Eastside initiative (MRAi).

Its goals are to:

1. Increase the accessibility and impact of research
2. Increase the availability of DTES community materials (program reports and community research, for example)
3. Create opportunities for sharing and learning between community organizations, community members, researchers, students, and others

The DTES Research Access Portal, which you’ll read about in the following section, is the most visible example of the MRAi’s work, but not the only one. Read on to learn more about this multi-faceted project.

Defining Terms

DTES—Downtown Eastside
A low-income community in Vancouver that bears the burden of complex societal issues often beyond its control. A robust and active community of activists, artists, and hard-working people with unique insights to share.

MRAi—Making Research Accessible initiative
A wide-ranging group that came together to address obstacles to accessing research related to the DTES—led by the UBC Learning Exchange in partnership with the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at UBC Library, in consultation with community organizations and residents, and with input from the Vancouver Public Library, Simon Fraser University Library, and a number of UBC units and departments. The MRAi is responsible for the DTES RAP. Learn more: dtesresearchaccess.ubc.ca

DTES RAP or RAP
A freely available online tool that links to thousands of research items related to the DTES, many of which are open access in UBC’s open access repository, cIRcle.

cIRcle. Funded by UBC Library’s Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, designed by the MRAi team, and built by UBC Library’s Technology, Discovery, and User Experience team and UBC IT Library Applications. Launched in March 2020. Learn more: circle.ubc.ca

STOREE
A key part of the MRAi, the Supporting Transparent & Open Research Engagement & Exchange project is a UBC-based research project on how libraries can improve communication about research. It includes the SFU Library, UBC Library and UBC Learning Exchange. Learn more: storee.ubc.ca

Not familiar with the MRAi?

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Angie, community participant in an MRAi Knowledge Café workshop.
Launched in March 2020, the Downtown Eastside Research Access Portal (DTES RAP) is a public online tool that makes it easier to find and access research items related to the DTES, most of which are freely available. The 1,700+ items represent many hours spent discovering research (community and academic), working with creators to preserve their work if necessary in UBC’s open access repository (cIRcle), and linking to it in the DTES RAP, either in that repository or in its original online location.

The DTES RAP is a result of an interdisciplinary collaboration between a number of UBC departments, other post-secondary institutions, libraries, and community groups. Learn more: dtesresearchaccess.ubc.ca

Benefits

- Easier to find DTES-related research and identify what has already been studied
- Provides place to share academic and community research
- Supports community advocacy, grant writing, program development
- Supports student learning about the DTES without burdening the DTES
- Highlights current projects in the community and ways to connect with researchers
- Supports open scholarship at UBC
- Provides practical learning opportunities for students
- Offers space for innovative approaches to scholarly publishing

The MRAi and STOREE teams, including UBC iSchool students, are analyzing subject headings in the DTES RAP and reaching out to domain experts to develop a place-based thesaurus to create more socially responsive descriptions.

Spotlight on Teaching: Open Tools and Resources for Educators

To help prepare the next generation of information professionals at UBC to support community-university partnerships, members of the MRAi and the STOREE team worked together to create an open lesson plan with supporting materials for library and information instructors to use in courses focused on publishing practices, open access, and copyright. These open education resources (OER) use the DTES Research Access Portal as a case study. Learn more: bit.ly/46DuCDU

Most DTES RAP items are open access (left). Some link to other public platforms (middle). A few require specialized credentials such as subscriptions to access (right). Graph shows the increase in each type from May 2022 to March 2023.

The number of links to items in the Downtown Eastside Research Access Portal started near 1,000 in 2020 and has nearly doubled in the years since.
Community Impact

141
Community members received one-on-one reference support from the Community Engagement Librarian Pilot position from March 2020 to March 2023.

369+
Community generated research items added to the RAP.

Beyond the DTES RAP, the MRAi team also works with DTES groups on a variety of projects that benefit from or contribute to research. Sometimes the MRAi team connects UBC students to community groups to work on a variety of research-related projects. In addition, the MRAi has provided reference consultations or community-based research support through the Community Engagement Librarian pilot position (now complete) and the Community-Based Research Coordinator at the UBC Learning Exchange.

Spotlight on Community Advocacy: Exploring DTES Emergency Response Alternatives

Police are the default first responders in the DTES for a wide range of social issues, from mental illness to substance use to homelessness. But this may not be the best way to respond to emergencies in a community where relationships with police are charged. With input from the DTES community and some support from the MRAi, the project described on the next page is exploring some alternatives.

How did this further the project?
HH: The support from the Community Engagement Librarian at the onset of the project was significant. It helped guide us in our research and centred the work around the articles, publications, and resources he was able to identify. Also, with the student’s support, the project was able to keep up its momentum and reach a quicker deadline due to the added capacity and skills.

What stage is the project at now?
HH: We have completed the report and presented it to the DTES community for engagement, co-design, and feedback. Having met with over 30 organizations, we are now ready to take the next step and look for funding to complete a more formal feasibility study. The UBC Learning Exchange has connected us to funders, like the Central City Foundation and SPARC BC, and is also reaching out to academics to help the project move to the next steps, which could be a pilot project.

Why is the MRAi important from your point of view?
HH: It’s an important hub for information and knowledge transfer. Knowing that these community-based research and knowledge exchange resources are available is critical when we’re working on community projects like this. It is so helpful to have someone do those first steps, make connections to students and academics that have capacity, and provide the beginning resources needed for your research. Also having a space for your community research projects to live [In the DTES RAP] is important, too, so they can be shared widely in community and used to support other projects that may be happening.
Since the summer of 2022, the MRAi team has worked closely with DTES organizations to preserve important community materials in UBC’s open access repository (cIRcle) and/or linking to them through the RAP. Some notable materials include extensive oral accounts of the historic Woodward’s Squat (or “WoodSquat”) that happened 20 years ago, one of the most prominent acts of civil disobedience in the history of Vancouver and a harbinger of future housing protests. These materials in particular were made available by Woodward’s Amateur Historical Society (W.W.A.S), 221A, and Recollective: Vancouver Independent Archives Week.

This work supports both the long-term preservation of rich sources of community information—annual reports, strategic plans, oral histories, podcasts, zines, and even interactive maps—and promotes their use alongside conventional academic items. So far, the MRAi team has worked with 14 DTES organizations and received valuable input on the metadata to describe these unique works.

This helps span the gap between the scholarly record and what librarians call ‘grey literature’—important work that is often “posted” on a website but not “published” in a publication.

“I can’t underscore this enough,” said Aleha McCauley, Community Engagement Librarian at the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at UBC Library and member of the MRAi Steering Committee. “Some people estimate that three quarters of the links on the Internet will stop working within 10 years. A number of the items we worked with were hosted in unstable online spaces and weren’t easy to find. Archiving these materials in cIRcle (in preparation for inclusion in the DTES RAP) ensures persistent access to these materials—these links won’t break—and are easier to find with the metadata we’ve added.”

Spotlight on Community Programs: Bidding for the DTES Street Market

Funded by the City of Vancouver, the DTES Street Market has been operating since 2012 to provide safe, low-barrier vending and income generation opportunities for residents of the DTES. Last year the Binners’ Project won an open bid to operate the market. The following describes how the MRAi project supported the Binners’ Project with their bid. Binners’ Project is a DTES organization that fosters social and economic inclusion, builds community resilience and stronger networks, and engages on sustainability issues.

Name: Sean Miles  Role: Director  Organization: Binners’ Project

What project did the MRAi support?

**Sean Miles:** The MRAi supported our Request for Proposal (RFP) to operate the DTES Street Market with the City of Vancouver last summer. We were seeking more information about the informal economy to help strengthen our application. This proposal was important to expand the work of Binners’ Project and better support informal vending in the DTES.

What did the MRAi team do?

**SM:** Nick, [Community Engagement Librarian in a pilot role at the UBC Learning Exchange] helped us find research related to informal vending to help inform our application. We were specifically looking for approaches and strategies that may have been studied or implemented in other cities around the world.

How did this further the project?

**SM:** The results of the search helped solidify our application and gave us more confidence in our vision for the DTES Street Market.

What stage is the project at now?

**SM:** The RFP process completed and we were successful in our application.

Why is the MRAi important from your point of view?

**SM:** I think being able to utilize the power of research to help inform decisions and in advocacy is extremely important, and MRAi allows for a more accessible way for that to be done for community organizations like ours. This program is a groundbreaking and useful resource and should be adequately funded and supported by UBC.

Spotlight on Community Materials: Woodward’s Squat Oral Histories, and More

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**Preserving Materials**

- **450** New DTES-related items preserved in cIRcle through community materials project
- **224** Items identified in cIRcle now geo-tagged as relevant to DTES
- **4-5/month** average # of enquiries sent to creators to support them adding items & links to DTES RAP
Student Impact

15 students employed by the MRAI in co-op, professional experience, graduate research and graduate academic assistant positions since 2016, co-supervised and funded by the Learning Exchange and Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.

296 students completed assignments, practicum placements, or volunteer positions related to the MRAI:
- 283 students developed infographics (ASTU 100)
- 6 undergrads (Urban Ethnographic Field School)
- 3 graduate students (EDST 583)
- 3 community field experience students (UBC teaching program)
- 1 medical student (FLEXMed)

886 students introduced to open-access ideas and/or DTES information goals.

Student Spotlight: Emma Moros and the Alternatives to Emergency Response Project

Emma Moros: Alternatives to Emergency Response Project
As the Community-Based Research (CBR) Assistant at the UBC Learning Exchange, Emma Moros worked on various aspects of the MRAI project, including the Researcher and Project directories in the DTES RAP, where scholars who do research related to the DTES are listed so that community members can connect with them about their work. Emma also supported the Alternatives to Emergency Response (AER) in the DTES project described below. Here Emma reflects on how that work supported their learning in their Archival Studies and Library and Information Studies Dual Masters program.

What was your role in the AER project?
Emma Moros: I worked on a literature review looking at alternative emergency response models in Portland, Edmonton and Toronto and highlighted how different approaches work. I also created an outline for a backbone for the report, and did some editing. I just wanted to help and support and carry out tasks since I didn’t know a lot about the issue at first. The purpose of the report was to provide information and identify some possibilities as a starting point for a conversation with communities in the DTES.

What did you learn?

EM: What was new was the relational and contextual learning—learning how to work with project leads and folks from other community organizations. The experience working with this project and other Downtown Eastside community organizations really shaped my ideas about what archiving can do, and it helped round out my understanding of community justice systems. I had all these threads about ethics floating around in my head. Working on the MRAI really helped me pull those threads together as they relate to doing research in the community. I had never done academic research or seen the mechanics of how that might work or how a researcher approaches things and the community considerations around what they generate and how that affects the community. Now I just have a much clearer sense that interesting findings aren’t enough. That’s something I really took away from working on this project.

Spotlight on Innovative Genres: Infographics

For the second year, students from Art Studies 100 (ASTU 100) worked with researchers to develop infographics of research accessible via the RAP. These infographics have now been downloaded more than 1,000 times. To support the work, Shannon Murray, a student librarian and Graduate Research Assistant for the STOREE project, developed an infographic toolkit that provides step-by-step advice on language, design, and the visual elements. Available via the DTES RAP here bit.ly/3NFkqw3.

~20 Researcher approved infographics published via cIRcle and the DTES RAP
1,001 Number of times infographics have been downloaded via the DTES RAP

The MRAI team also launched a new program at the UBC Learning Exchange called Knowledge Cafés to discuss research topics with community members using these infographics, in part. The workshop is intended for community residents and frontline workers.

“Working with the MRAI has been an enormous benefit to our first-year students in the Coordinated Arts Program,” said Dr. Evan Mauro, Lecturer in the Coordinated Arts Program (ASTU 100) at UBC. “Students are interacting with community-based researchers and contributing meaningfully to a knowledge exchange project. This is so empowering for them, and it helps shape their sense of what research can and should be. The MRAI is influencing the way we teach first year research and writing skills, and helping us centre key concerns around research ethics and community engagement.”
Dr. Lindsey Richardson is a research scientist with the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) and associate professor in the Department of Sociology at UBC. She is a medical sociologist whose research focuses on the dynamics and impacts of employment, income generation, and poverty among people who use drugs.

Researcher Impact

Dr. Lindsey Richardson is a research scientist with the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) and associate professor in the Department of Sociology at UBC. She is a medical sociologist whose research focuses on the dynamics and impacts of employment, income generation, and poverty among people who use drugs. The OPPRA project provided people who use substances with research methods training so that they can design and lead studies of relevance to their community. In the second year of the pilot, Heather Holroyd, the former Community-Based Research Coordinator at the UBC Learning Exchange and a key contributor to the MRAi, collaborated with the study team and connected them with the Community Research Ethics Workshop project and the UBC Research Ethics Board, as well as facilitating three ethics training workshops. These groups developed a series of research ethics training workshops for DTES community members and produced the Facilitator’s Guide for Community Research Ethics Training Workshops. Members of the cohort also approached the Community Engagement Librarian for assistance in identifying research and resources to help determine the scope of the research question they’d like to pursue.

Why is the MRAi important to researchers who do research related to the DTES?

Lindsey Richardson: The DTES RAP is a portal that has become a vital piece of the community-university infrastructure. As a centralized way to relay research findings to the community, it helps simplify the process of locating research about the DTES. And the creative ways that MRAi has developed to convey research findings means that researchers’ results pass through a lens that is focused specifically on sharing information in a way that is more attuned to the needs and perspectives of the community. There are limitations on time and resources for researchers who are committed to doing community-responsive, high quality knowledge translation and exchange, and the MRAi is a key support for that work.

The MRAi is designed to get research to places where it is accessible, digestible, and usable. From synthesizing areas of research in a podcast, providing a user-friendly repository for research, facilitating connections with community, and proactively seeking sharable copies of research manuscripts and associated materials, there are multiple ways to support the uptake of research in the community.

“The RAP is a portal that has become a vital piece of the community-university infrastructure.”

- Dr. Linsey Richardson, research scientist BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU), associate professor Dept. of Sociology at UBC

Spotlight on CBR: Overdose prevention peer research assistant study (OPPRA)

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Who is the MRAi?

Current Steering Committee Members:
- Lupin Battersby, Knowledge Mobilization Officer, SFU Research Commons, Simon Fraser University
- Katherine Cheng, Community-Based Research Coordinator, UBC Learning Exchange
- Genevieve Creighton, Manager, UBC Knowledge Exchange, Office of the Vice-President Research & Innovation
- Geoff D’Auria, Communications Specialist, UBC Learning Exchange
- Heather De Forest, Community Scholars Librarian, Belzberg Library, Simon Fraser University
- Kathleen Leahy, Director, UBC Learning Exchange
- Shirley Lew, Dean, School of Arts & Sciences at Vancouver Community College (VCC)
- Kirby Manià, Lecturer, School of Journalism, Writing, and Media, UBC
- Evan Mauro, Lecturer, Coordinated Arts Program, UBC
- Aleha McCauley, Community Engagement Librarian, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, UBC Library
- Kristina McDavid, Librarian, UBC Library, Undergraduate Medical Education, Woodward Library
- Timothy McMillan, Branch Head, nəcəʔam̓ct Strathcona Branch, Vancouver Public Library
- Heather O’Brien, Professor, UBC iSchool
- Jean Ruiz, Senior Behavioural Research Ethics Analyst, UBC Office of Research Ethics
- Michelle Stack, Academic Director, UBC Learning Exchange

Spotlight on Welcomes and Goodbyes

The MRAi is excited to welcome Dr. Michelle Stack to the team! Michelle has a wealth of experience with making research more accessible, including analyses of the relationship between academic publishing and university rankings. She takes over as chair of the MRAi and as Academic Director of the UBC Learning Exchange from Dr. Angela Towle, who developed the original vision for the MRAi. On behalf of the MRAi, we’d like to thank Angela for her vision and leadership.

Community Engagement Librarian Pilot

The MRAi is grateful for the dedication and work Nick Ubels undertook in a pilot role as the MRAi’s Community Engagement Librarian in a pilot role at the UBC Learning Exchange. Nick was instrumental in the ongoing development of the DTES RAP, was a point of outreach between UBC Library and the DTES community organizations and residents, and supported students’ work with community organizations on their information and research-related goals. The Community Engagement Librarian pilot was an important component of many of the initiatives outlined in this report and highlighted the value of having an academic librarian embedded in the UBC Learning Exchange environment. The UBC Learning Exchange and the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre are exploring ways to continue this work in the future.

Nick Ubels, Community Engagement Librarian (pilot), second from left.
Scholarship About the MRAi

The MRAi project has offered a number of opportunities to capture research findings about the process of making scholarly research more accessible. The following shows some of the scholarly papers, podcasts, and other items the team has produced.

**Scholarship About the MRAi**

- Mauro, E., Mania, K., Ubels, N., & Murray, S. (2022, April 19). Collaborative visual storytelling through research infographics. BCLA Conference.
- Ubels, N. (2021, Mar 30). One year into the pandemic: The DTES RAP. [Radio Interview]. Vancouver Co-op Radio 100.5 FM.

**Thank You**

To everyone actively supporting and working collaboratively with the Making Research Accessible initiative.
Making Research Accessible Initiative (MRAi)

Foundational Report

March 2020 - March 2023