

# research snapshot

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## CERIS - The Ontario Metropolis Centre: Knowledge Exchange

### What is this research about?

CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre was one of five research centres that promoted policy-relevant research about immigration, settlement, and diversity in Canada.

Research findings that are timely and structured to be useful to policy makers may contribute to responsive and effective policy by ensuring that decisions are based on informed options. In this context, knowledge that results from academic research is often viewed as more reliable and more authoritative than knowledge produced by NGOs. To challenge this notion and to ensure the policy relevance of its research, CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre included government and NGO partners in all stages of its research from the identification of research questions to dissemination of new knowledge. The partnerships with NGOs who were rooted in newcomer communities increased the scope and quality of knowledge exchange.

The researchers identified three communities involved in knowledge exchange:

1. Policy Makers.
2. Academics, NGOs, policy institutes, think tanks and media.
3. Knowledge brokers (who bridge between the first two).

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers analysed their observations from 4 research symposia hosted by CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre to discuss the following topics:

- Community-based research about immigration and

### What you need to know:

Research symposia held by CERIS- The Ontario Metropolis Centre were effective in promoting knowledge sharing between government, community organizations and universities. While the public sector creates policy, partnerships between community organizations and universities are important in knowledge creation that can support decision making.

settlement in Ontario.

- The expanding temporary foreign worker program.
- Challenges of evaluating the impact of immigrant-serving agencies
- Methods of evaluating the impact of the sector serving immigrants.

Proposed by NGOs, each topic engaged academic researchers, representatives from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, and many immigrant-serving agencies. NGO representatives filled numerous roles in the symposia. In addition to assisting with all aspects of their organization, they introduced the topics of the symposia, presented research, and discussed the presentations. To facilitate knowledge exchange after each event, research summaries were created and information about each presentation was posted on-line. The summaries were also distributed widely to all levels of government and to non-governmental organizations across the province.

### What did the researchers find?

The symposia successfully connected participants from

the academic, government and NGO sectors, providing a valuable venue for knowledge exchange. Due to their location in Toronto, low registration fees, and short duration, the symposia were accessible to NGO and government representatives. Influenced by the priorities of NGOs, each symposium was also timely, dealing with issues that were current at the time.

Researchers found that the greater capacity for government and educational institutions to engage in research and knowledge mobilization often left NGOs at a disadvantage. This disadvantage was reinforced by funders' frequent requirement that research projects be based in universities.

The confidential nature of the policy-making process makes it difficult to specify how knowledge exchange influences policy outcomes. Nevertheless, there were several observable outcomes from the symposia:

- Researchers and NGOs were able to partner on research projects.
- All levels of government, researchers and NGOs began a dialogue about major policy issues in the immigration arena.

The researchers emphasize that meaningful knowledge exchange requires trust, good relationships and mutual respect developed through sustained engagement. For NGOs and academic researchers, precarious funding and shifting funding priorities make it difficult to sustain partnerships.

### How can you use this research?

Researchers who are interested in pursuing policy-relevant research may consider working with an existing research centre that has well-established partnerships with community organizations.

Policy makers and academics should affirm the importance of community based organizations in their research. Although front line staff and service organizations rarely have the capacity to do their own research, they do have important insights into how policies are affecting their clients and agencies. The capacity of NGOs that can undertake policy-relevant research should also be recognized, cultivated, and funded through sustained partnerships.

The importance of the networking functions that continue at CERIS should not be underestimated.

### About the Researchers

Dr. Valerie Preston is a Professor in the Department of Geography at York University.

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### Keywords

Knowledge mobilization, Knowledge translation, Symposia, Government, Non-Profit, Community organizations, Research, Partnerships

### Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

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