Transcript of Plain Language Podcast:
When Faculty are Community-First

When Charles Levkoe entered academia, he knew he wanted his research to contribute to the food sovereignty movement.

[Sound up of biting an apple]

Since he'd worked for several community organizations before pursuing his PhD, he was motivated to put the needs of community front and centre in his academic work.

As an academic co-lead of CFICE's Community-Campus Engagement Brokering Working Group, Charles puts this community-first ethos to work regularly.

[Sound up of typing on a typewriter]

His research is primarily focused on the relationship between food systems and social movements. In 2017, Charles led a team that worked with Food Secure Canada to encourage contributions towards a national food policy that supported an improved food system.

The success of this project was in large part due to the community-first oriented collaboration between the community and academic partners. Together, they identified Food Secure Canada's research priorities.

Working with Amanda Wilson, a post-doctorate fellow, Charles supported these priorities by helping Food Secure Canada prepare policy briefs, organize focus groups and consultations, and apply for grants. Because Charles prioritized Food Secure Canada's needs, both academic and community partners were able to better respond quickly and with added authority to the Government of Canada's shortened food policy consultation window.

[Sound up of applause]

The success of Charles' focus on being community first is reflected by CFICE's research results. Time and again, CFICE projects have been more successful when community priorities drive project work. After four years studying how to enhance community-campus partnerships, CFICE has also developed some key practices that faculty can adopt to develop more meaningful relationships with their community partners.

First, start any community-campus partnership by clarifying the roles and expectations for all partners involved in the project. This includes recognizing and acknowledging the value of community knowledge as well as the time commitment that it requires.

Second, faculty can enhance community-first engagement by helping to prepare students for long-term community-campus engagement relationships before placing them in the community. For example, provide students with training in ethical practices of community engagement and offer ongoing mentoring support.

Third, faculty can work to strengthen the value of community-campus engagement at universities through activities like building a community contribution into research grant proposals, advocating for faculty training on community-first engagement practices, and encouraging the university to recognize faculty engagement through tenure and promotion processes.

[Sound up of a cash register's "cha-ching"]

According to Charles, engaging in community-campus partnerships is extremely rewarding. Not only does it provide faculty with the opportunity to build relationships with community partners that go beyond the initial research projects, but it often makes a significant impact in the communities involved.

Charles says that individuals interested in engaging in community-first work should start with the issues that they are passionate about. From there, faculty should think about how they can have an impact on these issues, and the skills they can use to contribute to addressing these issues. As he notes of his own work, community-engagement is a long-term commitment that's about working together for a collective impact.

For more information, you can access CFICE's community engagement recommendations for faculty by visiting carleton.ca/communityfirst/.

This plain language podcast is brought to you by the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement project, a 7 year action-research project that investigates how to improve community-campus partnerships.

[End of Podcast]