Transcript of Plain Language Podcast:
When Post-Secondary Institutions are Community-First

In May of 2018, CFICE shared some of what we've learned when it comes to being community first. These actions are specific to the roles played within a partnership, and have been proven to strengthen the relationship between post-secondary institutions and community based organizations. This podcast will focus on what we've learned about what post-secondary institutions can do in order to ensure their community-campus engagements are equitable.

As institutions, post-secondary institutions need to prioritize their community partners. This can present itself in ways as simple as offering access to resources like libraries. This can also be demonstrated through a minor policy change. Here's what happened when Carleton University was able to change how they understood and enforced their travel policy.

[Sound up of race cars driving on a track]

Before 2016, CFICE travellers had to pay for their travel expenses up front, and then apply for reimbursements with their receipts in hand. This tends to be standard practice within institutions, as every dollar spent needs to be accounted for. However, a small shift in the interpretation of this policy allowed for better community representation within the CFICE project.

Costs of plane tickets and accommodations can really add up, especially when you're waiting weeks or even months to be reimbursed.

[Sound up of change jingling in a hand]

This dissuaded many valuable community partners from attending CFICE events. As this was obviously a problem, Carleton's Research Accounting office took the time to update its interpretation of the travel policy. This opened up room for a bursary.

Individuals could then apply for a travel bursary which would be awarded based on an estimate of the costs, and was offered up front. This allowed for a stronger physical presence of community partners at CFICE events, which is preferable to having people skyped in, especially when major decisions are being made.

[Sound up of voices echoing in a grand hall]

The bursary isn't a perfect solution, as it's still taxable, but it's definitely an example of how a small policy change on the part of a post-secondary institution can help community partners, and strengthen their relationship.

Of course policy change isn't the only way to ensure that post-secondary institutions are community first. CFICE's research offers many other suggestions too. CFICE's research shows that in order to be community first, post-secondary institutions should develop and support a professional working circle for community-campus engagement. In order to ensure that the relationship is equitable, these working circles should have sufficient faculty, professional staff, senior administration, and community partner representation.

Post-secondary institutions also need to offer faculty and students support in community-campus engagement work. For example, mentoring opportunities for faculty and students can be a great way to spread a community-first perspective. Post-secondary institutions also need to provide extensive and ongoing training to the faculty, administration, and students. Those working on the institutional side of community-campus engagement need to be properly trained in order to ensure an equitable balance of power. Post-secondary institutions also need to offer meaningful incentives for community-engaged scholarship. Adequate support from post-secondary institutions can be crucial in laying down the groundwork for further research that strengthens community organizations.

Of course, these are only a few examples of the ways in which post secondary institutions can be community-first, and what may seem like small steps can actually have a huge impact.

For more information, you can access CFICE's community engagement recommendations for Post-secondary institutions by visiting Carleton.ca/communityfirst/

[Sound up of typing on a keyboard]

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]