

**The Think&EatGreen@School Small Grants Initiative:
How the Distribution of Resources Supported the Project's Community of
Learners and Contributed to Community-Engaged Scholarship**

This chapter tells a story of how small community granting programs can support Community-Engaged Scholarship. We show how the Think&EatGreen@School Small Grants initiative emerged during TEGS' action research as an important part of the process of ensuring community participation and engagement in our research project. Our objective in this chapter is to describe the Small Grants initiative and investigate its role in discovering common goals and creating a synergistic network of community stakeholders to work towards them. The Small Grants initiative was seen early on in the TEGS project as a way of developing a strong community of learners bound by relationships of reciprocity and trust. In this chapter we document the process TEGS followed to initiate and develop the Small Grant initiative as an integral part of our research approach to community-engaged scholarship. A key goal of our paper is to show how the distribution of small grants to a diversity of community stakeholders enabled trust and teamwork to flourish within our networks, while also deepening communication between university and community team members alike. The Small Grant process not only emboldened the legitimacy of our work in the eyes of the community of practitioners we sought to reach, it also gave these educators a strong voice in crafting our research objectives and bringing them to life. The Small Grant initiative also generated a key source of data and ongoing feedback for the TEGS project. The distribution of Small Grants enabled TEGS to truly embody the values of community-engaged scholarship.

TEGS' Small Grant initiative was established in the second year of the TEGS research project as a way to:

- Listen to the main stakeholders: the schools, teachers and NGO community partners, in order to better understand what schools needed. We also wanted to specifically identify which schools and teachers had an interest in carrying out Think&EatGreen@School initiatives;
- Increase our contacts within the Vancouver School Board;
- Better understand the goals and objectives of individual school communities;
- Find educators, students, parents, and other school community members who were genuinely interested in school food system change;
- Record and map the work that schools in Vancouver were doing to implement healthy, sustainable school food systems;
- Convene a synergistic network of stakeholders working towards overarching goals for Vancouver's school food system.
- Strengthen connections with individual schools in order to connect students from UBC to action-research opportunities that could address the real needs of the community while working as part of our community-engaged scholarship approach.

These objectives were defined by the TEGS core team through an iterative and oral process.

They have been held and coordinated over the course of the Small Grants initiative by lead author Elena Orrego. In this chapter we describe information generated over 4 years of running the Small Grants initiative. We draw on this evidence to highlight the important role of the Small Grant initiative in creating shared goals and relationships of mutual respect and trust across a wide and diverse community of learners. Our experience supports small granting programs as a useful tool in Community-Engaged Scholarship.

Emergence of the Small Grants Initiative

The core research team's initial **research grant application** to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) included a commitment by TEGS to focus upon "Projects of Community Impact." At that point a specific mechanism to elicit the voice of individual school communities was not yet developed. We agreed, within our team of UBC researchers and community partners,¹ that the objectives and outcomes must be jointly defined, yet the people most impacted by the problems we sought to address [that is teachers, students and parents] were not initially a part of this consultation process or the TEGS core research team. A small proportion of the original research budget had been set aside for "Community Engagement," with the hope of finding equitable ways to meaningfully engage a broad spectrum of people from individual school communities in our community of learners. Our community engagement budget would eventually become the seed funding we needed to start the Small Grant initiative.

From the very beginning, our transdisciplinary research alliance perceived the need to obtain the commitment of individual school communities to work within our Community-University Research Alliance. We were strongly committed to Community-Engaged Scholarship and felt a need to "walk the talk," and thereby create relationships of reciprocity and trust with individuals, schools and within our existing alliance. In 2009, after the research team obtained seed funding from SSHRC to develop a full grant proposal, students within the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC visited all 110 schools in the Vancouver School Board (VSB) as a part of their course work, to inquire about the extent to which initiatives of the kind proposed by TEGS already existed. In the following year, the members of the core research alliance met

¹Including non-profit organizations, public health institutions, members of the Vancouver Board of Education, and other university-based researchers.

several times to identify priorities and elaborate on ways to evaluate impacts in the schools, but still without the involvement of individual school communities.

Several discussions about priorities and budget allocations led to the conclusion that there was a need to better balance action outcomes in school food systems with traditional academic research outputs. These discussions led to the formal adoption of the Community-Engaged Scholarship (CES) approach described elsewhere in this book.² This approach recognizes that “[d]irect involvement of people affected by the problem under study facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of their social reality. By directly involving those affected and those serving the affected, experiential knowledge is brought to the research process” (Balcazar, Keys, Kaplan, & Suarez-Balcazar, 1999, p.92; See also: Harper & Carver, 1999; Selener, 1997). The TEGS research team felt that the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the research process was an important way of demonstrating our research’s accountability to society (Cloete 1997; Hemlin and Rasmussen 2006; Chataway et al. 2007; Ozga 2007; Spaapen et al. 2007; de Jong et al. 2011).

We assumed that by including teachers and others involved at the individual school level, our larger community of learners would be able to meaningfully connect with, and learn from, individual school experiences, thereby significantly improving our capacity to achieve socially relevant outcomes (Hemlin and Rasmussen 2006; de Jong et al. 2011). As Carew & Wickson (2010, p.1147) articulate, we wanted to integrate “potentially disparate knowledges with a view to creating useable knowledge. That is, knowledge that can be applied in a given problem context and has some prospect of producing desired change in that context.” Finding a way to invite individual school communities into the discussion as equal participants in our research

² The original SSHRCC proposal used the terms “Community-Based Action Research” and “Community-Based Experiential Learning” or “Community of Learners” to describe our research approach. We felt these were best encapsulated by the single term “Community-Engaged Scholarship.”

team became increasingly important as a way of creating truly useful knowledge and empowering positive change in school food systems.

How Small Grants worked

Starting in TEGS' second year of five of the SSHRC grant, the Small Grants initiative was created as a pilot effort to increase participation of: teachers, students, administrators, and parents in the challenges being studied. Over four years of administering funding through the Small Grants initiative, TEGS provided \$110,000 to 57 public schools within the VSB. School-based teams were formed in response to TEGS' call for the submission of school-team-generated projects. One of the requirements of the application process was that each school applying formed a team of at least four members, with a minimum of one teacher and the formal endorsement of the school Principal.

Each year, TEGS allocated a set amount to the Small Grant initiative, and this money was distributed amongst all applicant schools. We very rarely turned a school team down, so long as their application was complete and submitted within the application period. Resources were distributed amongst all applicant schools based on the established application criteria, with more funds going to projects that demonstrated high potential for achieving significant action outcomes.

The amount that we were able to give schools increased over the years, as we received contributions from the Vancouver Retired Teachers' Association and the Vancouver School Board, which bolstered our initiative's budget. Grants for individual school teams ranged from \$200-\$2000. To ensure the transparency of the process of allocating the Project's resources, a process of application to the Small Grants initiative was created and a committee representing the UBC team, the VSB, Vancouver Coastal Health, and the project's not-for-profit community

partners was set in place to evaluate the school-based teams' projects and provide feedback (see Figure 1 for application criteria). Flexible guidelines were provided by the leadership of the project, so teams at the schools could develop action plans tailored to each of the specific school's needs, while also still fitting within a framework of key goals identified by TEGS' core research team. The detailed applications for funding became an important source of data that supported our research goal of identifying particularly ripe 'Community Impact Projects.'

“Under the CES model, community members have an active role in identifying the needs and challenges of the community, providing project inspiration, guiding researchers, collecting data, mobilizing knowledge and facilitating the process to ensure the project produces and disseminates practical outputs.” (Edelglass, 2009, p.3; See also Israel et al. 1998; Roche, 2008). The Small Grants initiative became one more avenue for the integration of school-based teams into the larger team of Think&EatGreen@School, ensuring that individual school communities were adequately supported in identifying Community Impact Projects that could guide TEGS' research. We assumed that this would enable individual school teams to become key drivers of the action components of the food-related project at their schools. We hoped the distribution of funds would invite individual school teams to participate in a reciprocal sharing of resources and knowledge. While information provided by school teams through our granting process supported our research goals, our research funds would support school teams in realizing their own goals.

Figure 1: Small Grant Application Criteria

Application Criteria for 2011-2013 Small Grants Initiative

Criteria for becoming a *Think&EatGreen* School

Priority will be given to schools that can demonstrate (as many as possible of) the following criteria:

- o Involve a working **team of 3 or more** members committed to strengthening the connections within the food system at their school. This team may include teachers, administration, support staff, food service staff, maintenance staff, students, parents, or other community members. **At least one team member must be a teacher, administrator or other school staff member.**
- o Demonstrate a commitment to initiatives that **make connections between different aspects of the school food system** and provide **opportunities for student learning and activities** such as growing, preparing and sharing food and managing food waste.
- o Involve **partnerships** with community-based organizations and/or other schools.

Application Criteria for 2014-2015 Small Grants Initiative

Criteria for becoming a *Think&EatGreen* School

Priority will be given to schools that can demonstrate (as many as possible of) the following criteria. *Where applications are of equivalent merit -- according to the listed criteria -- preference will be given to applications that include a partnership with another elementary or secondary school.*

- o Partnerships between at least two schools with a joint application for Food System activities at both the schools.
- o Partnerships between a community organization and the applicant school(s).
- o Concrete action projects for improving aspects of the Food System at the school.
- o Creation of lesson plans around Food Systems that can be shared with other schools and interested parties.
- o Involve a working **team of 3 or more** members in *each* school who are committed to work collaboratively for healthy and sustainable food systems at their school. This team may include teachers, administration, support staff, food service staff, maintenance staff, students, parents, or other community members. **At least one team member must be a teacher, administrator or other school staff member.**

Our Method: The Small Grant Initiative

The Small Grants provided a source of key data for the TEGS research team. We used several tools to monitor and assess the outcomes of Small Grants at the school level. The applications submitted by school teams provided a very clear vision of their needs and interests in relation to food systems projects in their schools. Beginning in the 2012/13 school year,

schools that received Small Grants also filled in a Self Assessment. This tool was developed by the TEGS research team to monitor the evolution of school food systems and food education in the schools that received Small Grants.

The data obtained through Self Assessments addresses many TEGS objectives and research questions. These data have been systematized and presented in graph format in two preliminary reports that contain an analysis of the survey results titled ‘Think&EatGreen@School Food System Brief Self-Assessment Activity 2012-2013’ and ‘Think&EatGreen@School Food System Brief Self-Assessment Activity 2013-2014’. [Note for the Editorial Committee: Refer here to the chapter(s) where the Self Assessment data will be included)

The Small Grant school-based teams also created a poster report at the end of the school year to communicate their achievements in relation to their Small Grant projects. The poster reports were based on a template format created by the TEGS team at the end of each school year. We have posters from four years (2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014). These posters provide essential information about the schools ability to carry out their objectives as set in the application.

For the years, 2012, 2013, and 2014, we also gathered independent reports on all Small Grant schools. These were written by TEGS research assistants based on their work supporting the school teams in those schools. In the year 2013, the reports and observations from visits to the schools were condensed as short stories of a journalistic style (700 words approx.) and given to each of the schools as feedback after the research assistant visits. Table 2 details the numbers of schools that received Small Grants each year, as well as information about the amount of data we collected and funds distributed.

Table 2: Data collected and resources distributed for the duration of the TEGS Small Grants initiative from 2011-2015.

| | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 |
|--------------------|------------------|---|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| SG Applications | 14 | 17 | 33 | 26 ³ |
| SG Reports | - | 17 | 33 | - ⁴ |
| SG Schools | 14 | 17 | 33 | 38 |
| Short Stories | - | - | 33 ⁵ | - |
| # Self Assessments | - ⁶ | 16 | 31 | - |
| Funds Distributed | \$20,000 | \$20,000 + \$1000 from Vancouver Retired Teachers' Association | \$35,000 | \$35,000 + \$8000 from the VSB |

TEGS staff visited the schools that received Small Grants at least once a year to assess the team work at the school level, as well as to assist them in the implementation of their projects and mobilize support from TEGS when needed.

Trust, Engagement and Celebration

Throughout our research, TEGS has sought to create relationships of mutual trust. From the beginning, a key goal of the Small Grants initiative was to incorporate a diverse range of stakeholders as equal investigators in the community of learners, helping to establish the research process as trustworthy, fair and valuable in the eyes of those who stand to benefit from and/or use the research (Cash et al., 2002). As Belcher et al. (publication pending) explain, “legitimate transdisciplinary research ‘considers appropriate values, concerns, and perspectives of different actors’ (Cash et al. 2002: 2) and incorporates these perspectives into the research process through collaboration and mutual learning.” The Small Grants provided a mechanism to involve and

³ 2014-2015 was the first year that the Small Grants team put an emphasis on forming partnerships between schools and community-based organizations as part of the funding process. That is why there are more schools than grant applications for the 2014-2015 year.

⁴ As the project ended before the end of the school year in 2015, graduate research assistants did not visit to collect data for reports.

⁵ Short stories were only written for the 2013-2014 schools.

⁶ Self-assessments started in 2012.

celebrate a diversity of stakeholders in the TEGS team. Maple Grove Elementary attests to the usefulness of this approach to knowledge production when they report, “The TEGS team was pivotal in providing ideas and garden know-how as well as the support and encouragement to make those ideas a reality” (2013 poster project).

“Developing and establishing trust and mutual respect involves taking time to get to know the setting and the different stakeholders” (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2004, p. 87). It also requires that all stakeholders hold a positive attitude about the collaborative partnership (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson & Allen, 2001; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Nyden et al., 1997). TEGS regularly convened recipients of Small Grants schools and the larger community-university research alliance in face-to-face meetings, in order to help facilitate strong, positive and collaborative partnerships between hundreds of involved stakeholders. As VanTech reported in 2011, the momentum and energy of “the Small Grant from TEGS has facilitated VanTech teachers pursuing urban agriculture projects, resulting in a partnership where [Fresh Roots Urban Farm Society] is so excited and honored to be growing the first Schoolyard Market Garden in Canada with the VanTech school community” (Ilana Labow, VanTech poster, 2011)

Our team convened the recipients of Small Grants Schools as soon as grants were awarded and again to celebrate all of the projects undertaken by school teams. For 4 years we also hosted an annual 2-3 day professional development Institute, which created further opportunities for communication and sharing. These gatherings were critical to forming relationships of trust, wherein common goals and shared visions were articulated and actors were listened to in an environment that emanated open-mindedness, acknowledgement of the many ‘ways of knowing’, and a shared feeling of reciprocity. The truth that our community convened

around a shared interest in healthy school food systems further strengthened communication. Regularly present at all of these meetings, we as authors were witness to a slow, growing feeling of conviviality and trust. In the 3rd and 4th year of the Small Grant project, we saw that those who came to gatherings shared stories, sought advice, traded contact information, and embraced in a spirit of community solidarity where hugs and warm greetings were ubiquitous. At our final Small Grants meeting in 2015, more than 40 people stayed beyond the meeting's official close at 6:00pm, even though the vast majority had started the school day at around 8:00 am. At our final public event, the 2015 Think&EatGreen@School Institute, our community voluntarily lingered late on a Saturday afternoon, well after both our Principal Investigator, Alejandro Rojas, and our Project Manager, Elena Orrego, had delivered their final closing speech. Instead of quietly dispersing, the group insisted on gathering in a large circle of over 50 people to share in a silent passing of positive intention, as we each passed a squeeze from one held hand to the next. During this final event it was commonly agreed by the many school community members present that the TEGS Project had played a vital role in connecting and communicating a shared vision of healthy school food systems in Vancouver.

The Small Grants were sometimes used to support non-profit, community-based partner organizations in working with individual school teams. This funding often helped support: workshops, professional development training, and longer-term mentorship programs in recipient schools. School-based teams also used their funding to purchase: tools, cooking supplies, materials for building garden boxes and composting facilities, and release time for teachers to meet and plan activities and curricula related to TEGS' goals. Once they had established their gardens or cooking programs, many Small Grant schools would then invite community-based non-profit organizations that had relevant expertise to help the teachers learn how to connect

their curricula with hands-on-learning opportunities in their new outdoor learning spaces.

Community-based non-profit organizations also helped teachers learn specific skills, such as how to use produce from the school's food garden in the classroom, and how to recycle food waste into compost, and return nutrients back to the soil. Recognizing the integral role that community-based organizations play in school food action initiatives, TEGS committed to giving several non-profit community-partner organizations \$5000 each year to further support their work.

Through TEGS, typically, UBC faculty and students: collected data, provided knowledge of relevant research literature and research methodology, and supported access to useful resources and technology. Meanwhile, not-for-profit community-based organizations commonly brought: environmental education and food systems expertise, experience with addressing common issues in a school context, and knowledge of the cultural and contextual characteristics of the setting and community in which they worked. Collectively, our work coalesced around a vision of “a community-engaged approach to teaching, learning and research, which focuses on a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and human and material resources for the purpose of positive social change” (Becman& Hay 2003, p.1; see also: Israel et al 1998; Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Roche 2008).

Looking at the Impact of Small Grants through Multiple Lenses

In this section we tell the story of the Small Grants initiative from four different perspectives: an elementary school, a community-based NGO partner, UBC students, and a university-based researcher. Through these perspectives, we see in turn how the Small Grants initiative has supported: trust and teamwork; self-sufficiency; an equal distribution of power; and the generation of rich data.

Queen Elizabeth: Trust and Teamwork

At Queen Elizabeth Elementary (QE) the Small Grants initiative played an important role in developing strong relationships between school staff, community organizers, and university-based researchers. The school's perspective shows how the small granting process promoted reciprocal relationships based on trust and teamwork, a critical pre-requisite to conducting effective community-engaged scholarship (Suarez-Balcaez et al, 2005). Among the more than 40 schools involved in the Think&EatGreen@School network, Queen Elizabeth stands out as a telling example of the facilitative power of Small Grants --alongside the other TEGS initiatives-- in supporting the community-engaged scholarship approach. Over their five years participating in our community of learners, Queen Elizabeth's school food initiatives have significantly evolved from the seed of an idea planted by one very motivated teacher to a flourishing food garden capable of becoming a transformative feature within the school's food culture.

A key first step in Queen Elizabeth's journey towards a culture of integrated food cycle learning was the connection made between the school's food system champion, teacher Natasha Tousaw, and Catriona Gordon, the School Garden Coordinator for the local non-profit and TEGS Community Partner, Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC). This connection formed early in the school's journey towards wholly integrated school food systems (just months before TEGS began). The relationship would become a cornerstone and key first step in building a collaborative culture around food that was based on teamwork and mutual trust. As Natasha explains, "I could not have done this without SPEC. I could've done a little bit, but without Catriona's connections to others and to other schools... it would have been really slow going" (Key Players Interview). Natasha explains how at Queen Elizabeth, it wasn't teachers who first got on board as "key investors," but that it was instead "Catriona and my one key parent [who] have been really key in that" (Key Players Interview). She goes on to highlight that "a team is

important, critical. You can't do anything on your own" (Key Players Interview). Yet the reality of non-profit funding loomed heavily over Natasha and Catriona's relationship.

"Every year we wondered if she was going to be able to come back or not. And that was one of the big fears with expanding the garden beyond myself and my colleague who was right next door to me...I knew that I would be capable of teaching the curriculum and integrating it into the curriculum, and my own teaching, but I wasn't sure if anyone else could. And luckily Catriona has been able to stay on [to support that]" (Key Players Interview).

These comments were made in 2012, when QE's garden was still in a stage of becoming. Over the following three years, the school utilized TEGS' Small Grants initiative to maximize the impact of this relationship. Using TEGS' funds, they substantially upgraded their garden and food efforts to a point where all classes in the school are now able to be involved in every aspect of the school food cycle.

Through TEGS in general, and the Small Grants initiative specifically, the school received both garden development funds and UBC student support, which enabled the teachers at QE to become meaningfully involved in the garden. "[T]he grants have enabled us to expand our garden in such a way that we can, or we could, have every class planting something if they wanted to. To me that's huge because it's making this available to everybody. The possibility for everybody to be involved is there and it wouldn't have been without the involvement of TEGS" (Key Players Interview). This support was a key physical offering that supported a diversity of teachers in co-creating a healthy school food culture at QE.

Another equally important, if non-physical, aspect of TEGS' support for QE is expressed in Natasha's enthusiasm and appreciation. As a regular attendee of TEGS' Small Grant meetings

and events, Natasha has expressed a profound appreciation for the work and a visible affinity and respect for TEGS' research staff. As she explains in her Key Players Interview:

I'm really appreciative of your guy's program, TEGS, because I really feel like it's going to take an outside influence like an academic institution outside of the school board to ignite the fire that needs to be ignited in order to afford change because we are weary and we don't have a lot of clout, but other institutions do. And, what you guys are doing is really making a difference. More and more people are feeling like there is a beacon of hope.

By regularly convening teachers like Natasha in Small Grant meetings and professional development training sessions, the TEGS Small Grants initiative alongside the Institutes, the UBC student-run workshops, and the other TEGS activities, has given over 100 Vancouver educators tangible fuel to ignite or sustain this fire of change. The strong relationships of mutual respect and trust that are fostered during Small Grant gatherings have supported school food system change. This is further bolstered by the reciprocal sharing of resources and knowledge. In this way, the Small Grants initiative has fostered a culture of learning, which Kelly et al. (2000) describe as "the exchange and cycling of resources and the process of reciprocity, defined as the give-and-take of a relationship." This sharing creates receptive audiences for academic research findings and greatly enables knowledge translation and sharing between the Think&EatGreen@School community.

Environmental Youth Alliance: Promoting Self-Sufficiency

This section describes the impact that the Small Grants initiative has had on one of the key community non-profit organizations working in the TEGS community of learners. During the first year of the Small Grants initiative Matthew Kemshaw (one of this chapter's authors)

worked with the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA) to redesign the EYA's Growing Kids program. As the Program Coordinator from 2009-2012, Matthew collaboratively developed programming that would support school communities in building and maintaining outdoor food gardens as wholly integrated outdoor classrooms. Over the course of the Think&EatGreen@School project, the EYA established relationships with 12 school communities, committing to working towards change in each community over a period of 3 years. As the Growing Kids coordinator, Matthew developed an internship program to train community members to co-facilitate a wide range of hands-on activities, which the EYA delivered regularly in its partner schools. In this time, the EYA also worked to convene school meetings and support educators in learning how to utilize an understanding of food cycles and school yard gardens as tools to deepen ecological literacy.

The Think&EatGreen@School Small Grants initiative helped the EYA to both expand and deepen its relationships with teachers and administrative staff in several schools. Working collaboratively with school communities to complete applications to the Small Grants initiative inspired teachers to become more involved in school food system change and supported them in seeing our work as situated within a large, whole school food cycle. Once Small Grants were received, schools enjoyed a stronger atmosphere of support, and key champions began to see a growth of interest and curiosity towards their work. As Matthew's successor at the EYA, Alaina Thebault explains, the process of writing the grant, receiving it, attending a large gathering of all TEGS schools, completing the projects funded by the grant, and then reporting on what they had accomplished, empowered schools to "build on what we're doing [as EYA program staff] and make it their own." The buy-in that the Small Grants initiative engendered was a crucial tool in several schools, which helped the EYA to "deepen our work and create professional capacity

within specific schools” (Alaina Thebault, personal communication). Synergistically, this was *exactly* the goal of the Growing Kids program, which hoped to be able to fade out its involvement within schools after 3 years and leave healthy school food gardens to be utilized and maintained by the school community.

One of EYA’s biggest challenges was finding ways to support schools in becoming totally self-sufficient. The experiences of the EYA supporting schools in writing Small Grants demonstrates how useful the initiative was in stimulating teacher interest and generating school activity towards the creation of healthier food systems. By pairing outside community support with a process for acquiring small grants, teachers gained access to both the knowledge and the tools to slowly learn how to sustainably run integrated school food programs. By supporting this beneficial pairing the Small Grants initiative established school gardening as something worth valuing and investing in. Through the process of writing, receiving and reporting on their accomplishments, Matthew and Alaina both witnessed EYA’s partner schools becoming much more invested in the success of their school food gardens. This is echoed in our report on Trafalgar Elementary in the 2013/14 school year, who’s team stated that after working with EarthBites (another community non-profit organization) to secure a Small Grant, “it started to be less like a ‘field trip’ ... and began to be more embedded in the school culture.”

The perspective of a UBC Student: Navigating Power

This section describes 1) the impact that the Small Grants initiative has had on the integration of UBC students into TEGS’ community of learners, and 2) the impact that the initiative has had on the traditional power structures that are often seen in community-university relationships.

As a recent graduate of the Faculty of Land and Food Systems (LFS) at UBC, who has since taken on the role of a research assistant with TEGS, Nicole Read (one of this chapter's authors) is in the very unique position of having been exposed to the Think&EatGreen@School Project since its inception, but through multiple lenses. As an LFS 250 student in 2010, Nicole was part of one of the first groups of students to venture into the schools to collect data for TEGS. Her group visited Windermere Secondary (who became a Small Grant school in both 2011 and 2013) to collect data on their school food system. As this was Nicole's first-ever exposure to community-based learning, she remembers the excitement and incredulity she felt when she realized that in LFS, leaving the classroom and entering the community was not only acceptable, but encouraged as a form of learning. At the time, Windermere was quite advanced in their efforts towards creating a sustainable school food system and had already invested in: an industrial-style composter, filled with neighbourhood compost that students collected on bicycles, a greenhouse with an aquaponics system, a school garden, and a culinary arts program that focused on using local ingredients. Nicole remembers leaving Windermere feeling absolutely overcome with hope and a sense of meaning. That was the first time in the three years she had been at UBC that she had ever felt a connection between her education and the world outside of the UBC campus.

In 2014, a year after Nicole graduated from UBC, she joined TEGS as a research assistant. In this role, Nicole had the opportunity to visit Small Grant schools to hear their stories about their individual challenges and successes related to their sustainable food system initiatives. This time, she was entering schools after several years of community-based learning, not to mention countless other experiences, regardless Nicole still had the same feeling of incredulity that she had, had four years earlier as she connected her present with her past and

realized that the sense of purpose she had felt through TEGS in 2010 had translated into an actual purpose with TEGS in 2014.

The Small Grants initiative facilitated the visits of roughly 400 UBC students per year in an average of 50 classrooms per year to schools throughout the VSB, including many that had received funding from TEGS. This relationship is outlined in the Small Grants application form which states that school teams must have a “[w]illingness to facilitate the involvement of UBC students in the development of food system activities and projects at [their] school[s].” One of the most unique aspects of the Think&EatGreen@School’s Small Grants initiative has been its ability to give schools autonomy in deciding their own priorities, challenges, capacities, and needs when applying for funding, *while at the same time* providing overarching criteria that Small Grant school-based teams agree to abide by. Such criteria embody the essence of the Think&EatGreen@School project’s mission and objectives. The decision to give schools autonomy in deciding their own ‘Community Impact Projects’ (Rojas et al., 2011) has played a critical role in shifting the power dynamics in an environment where inequitable distribution of power and control is a frequently mentioned challenge (Israel et al., 1998). This shift serves as a reminder that “[w]hile challenges faced by communities may be initially recognized by academia, they can be addressed in a way that validates community partners as valid actors in producing knowledge and being part of the solution process” (Korzun et al., 2014, p.107).

Our experience indicates that navigating such a shift in power dynamics is a key component in the successful implementation of community-engaged scholarship. The relationship between the teams of the TEGS Small Grant recipient schools and UBC students is also a useful example of the mutual flow of knowledge and resources, both of which are also key components of community-engaged scholarship. As Natasha from Queen Elizabeth explains it:

I'm able to use the academic institution's students to come in and help...and they can see how it works here and then they can go forward and...change policies. They can learn from our mistakes and learn from the things that are and aren't working and then go ahead and start making some changes for the future. And having the students come in and teach lessons to the children I think it's really important for them, for their learning, and it's also important for our students to learn from other people, not just the teachers in the school. They can bring a lot of information that we haven't thought of or that's new that we [as teachers] haven't come across yet (Key Players Interview).

Here, Natasha describes “a sustained positive relationship between community partners, students and faculty, [which] strengthened the community-held perception that the CES-based partnership was beneficial” (Korzun et al., 2014, p. 109; Gelmon et. al., 1998; Hicks, 2009).

The Small Grants initiative effectively tied UBC students into the CES approach. This enabled UBC students to connect with the ‘real-world’ challenges, needs, opportunities, and capacities of creating food system change, while also creating an opportunity for university students to receive guidance from individuals like Natasha who have unique backgrounds and experiences to share. Moreover, the knowledge and experience that UBC students brought to the relationship was seen as an equally valid contribution by community partners, who do not always have the time or the ability to access resources and knowledge that are otherwise available to UBC students. This reciprocal sharing has created “networks where information and resources can be exchanged, [while also supporting] the connection of individuals and organizations that would otherwise not be connected” (Korzun et al., 2014, p.110).

The experience of university students acting as both teachers and learners serves as a sound metaphor for the reciprocal relationships engendered by the Small Grants initiative.

Through these relationships, the traditionally unbalanced power structures of researcher and researched were eroded while the larger aims and targets of sound research practice were upheld.

University Researcher – Generating Rich Data

This section of the chapter is written by Elena Orrego who is an Anthropologist and co-founder of the Think&EatGreen@School project. She is a member of TEGS Coordinating Committee and the Project Manager of TEGS. Elena has extensive national and international experience in community engagement activities and scholarship. She has contributed from the beginning of the project to the ongoing dialogue on how to increase and secure the TEGS commitment to community engagement.

The Small Grants initiative gave TEGS' university-based researchers a level of immersion into the Vancouver school community that they otherwise would not have had.

Developing entry into a community:

“[I]s not necessarily guaranteed by carrying the university name or holding an advanced degree. Developing entry into the community organization involves getting to know the community of interest by spending time learning about the organization's culture, history in the community, and vision for the future” (Harper et al., 2004 as cited in: Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005, p.87).

Investing in school communities gave TEGS' research staff critical access to the individual cultures, histories, and future visions of the school teams most impacted by the problems our research sought to address. This access, in turn, led to interactions within the community-university alliance that may not have otherwise happened organically. Key players within the school communities were identified, challenges and capacities were established that were unique to each school team, and opportunities for community-engaged scholarship and further research

were realized, in large part because the Small Grant initiative facilitated frequent visits to Small Grant schools and bi-annual meetings of school teams.

The data that was collected throughout the length of the Small Grants initiative included a range of qualitative and quantitative data that uniquely built on the histories of individual school partners as they reapplied for funding each year. For example, each year, schools were asked to identify and explain what was in place in their school communities, with space for specific details about: school gardens, school composting systems, school cooking programs, curriculum integration with whole food cycles, lunchrooms and connections to local farms, school lunch/meal programs, and any other relevant school activities that were applicable to TEGS' research objectives. In addition, schools were also asked to: identify members of their school teams, describe a work plan that identified objectives, specific actions, timelines, and associated budgets, answer questions about how they would evaluate the success of their participation in the project, and describe ways in which their school would integrate academic curricula with whole food system experiences. With such rich data collected over several years, the applications served as a unique tool for identifying challenges, needs, capacities, and opportunities that were distinct to each school's community or endemic to the larger Vancouver school context. Emergent patterns in this data have proven key to TEGS researchers, allowing us to: 1) identify ways that the project can better support schools by connecting them with others working on similar projects or issues; 2) design resources, workshops and events that can address challenges prevalent amongst many of the school communities, and; 3) work within the VSB to address policies that can better support school needs and capacities.

As described previously, the Small Grants program has yielded rich qualitative and quantitative data that has provided TEGS researchers with insights into the cultures, histories,

and future visions of each of the school communities. The history that has also been established through working with some of the school partners since 2011 has given the TEGS team opportunities for comparison and analysis of how each school's circumstances have changed over the course of the Project. In this way, TEGS has been able to not only better understand its influence in transforming school food systems in Vancouver, but also make decisions that better support the champions within the school system who are working so hard to create school food system change.

Conclusion

Although the Small Grants initiative did not initially start off as a part of the TEGS Project, it emerged as a key tool for conducting community-engaged scholarship and became an integral part of the overall TEGS Project. The Small Grants initiative indicates that TEGS: explicitly valued the role of school community voices within the Project; created opportunities for resource and knowledge sharing; generated rich information and valuable data; supported and encouraged critical networks of support and resource sharing; and sought to articulate the interests of a broad diversity of stakeholders. The willingness of TEGS to share resources through a small granting program also contributed to a leveling of the traditional power-dynamics often problematic in community-university research relationships. The multiplicity of connections and relationships created by the Small Grant initiative also critically situated university-based researchers in their environment of study, providing a deeper understanding of the individual contexts of each of the school communities, as well as the broader landscape that is the Vancouver school food system.

Through the giving of funds our Small Grant initiative created multiple outcomes and useful indicators to measure the overall project's success. We want to highlight that the care and

time taken to build and foster relationships within our community-university alliance must not be overlooked in this accounting, nor should the challenges faced in the process be ignored. Regular gatherings and genuine social interactions were important for creating an environment of trust, mutual respect, and reciprocity; these convivial gatherings are in themselves useful indicators of our project's success. University researchers, university students, community-based non-profit organizations, and individual school teams all shared their unique experiences and knowledge. Supporting the connections between different stakeholders, legitimizing their experiences, and recognizing their efforts were all keys that unlocked many of the findings described by the TEGS Project. Building these relationships takes time and intention. Facilitating large group meetings and hosting multiple events every year was a *significant* undertaking. One key challenge in this process was finding the time and resources to properly support and encourage our community of learners. The TEGS research project invested heavily in this undertaking.

Although we are confident that some initial funding is a key component in supporting increased collaboration towards truly healthy school food systems, there is a possibility that the Small Grants initiative may have created some degree of dependency on small amounts of funding that originated from sources other than the schools themselves, or the VSB. While this may be the case, we also believe that funding from the Small Grants initiative has assisted in the creation of a strong community of teachers, community partners, parents, students, and university partners. Such connection within the school food network helps ensure that schools are resilient and able to find the future resources that will be needed to continue growing, eating, and composting food at the school level, and to give children the tools necessary to become literate in such critical skills.

There is also the question of equal distribution versus affirmative action, and whether the TEGS project should have supported fewer schools with larger funding amounts as opposed to a greater number of schools with smaller funding amounts. This is especially relevant in that significant challenges were often faced at an institutional level by the small grant teams and the Small Grants initiative. Obstacles related to the use of school space, and the increase of work that having gardens or compost systems implied for teachers and grounds staff, were often challenges for small grant teams wanting to implement sustainable food system projects. There could be some merit in providing fewer schools with larger amounts of funding and more organizational support in the hope that they become leading examples to the rest of the school community, effecting change at an institutional level so that effective policies and support networks are already in place when challenges such as these arise. This question of equal distribution of funds is mentioned not as a regret of the project, but rather as an acknowledgement of the different strategies for supporting sustainable school food networks that can be put into practice, which should continue to be a part of the discussion moving forward.

Schools are agents of cultural and social change. The relationships and projects supported by the Small Grants initiative will require continued support and encouragement if they are to flourish. By inviting school actors into our community-university alliance, school communities have become active agents in this research, rather than passive subjects. School efforts have been legitimized and rewarded. When teachers, students and their larger communities become active citizens as opposed to passive individuals, we find ourselves one step closer to the goal of school food system transformation. That is, we have made progress towards our goal of “learn[ing] to see food as the grand connector of all aspects of human life, including the relationships between humans and nature” (Rojas et al., 2011, p.3). Yet our progress is incomplete, and much work

remains to be done. The truth that this project has reached the end of its funding cycle looms heavily. We wish our community the most sustained and flourishing success! We hope that support for individual school food action initiatives will continue to grow and evolve in the Vancouver School Board for many years to come.

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