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Community-Engaged Knowledge Mobilization for Health Equity: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of the City Symposium Series

C. Nadine Wathen, James Shelley, Makayla N. Gomes, Aya Mohamed, and Jennifer C. D. MacGregor

Abstract

Finding ways to move knowledge-to-impact is a key priority for research funding agencies, universities, and academics. However, academic engagement with the broader community is not without tensions and challenges, including arriving at mutual benefit and relevance, and addressing power dynamics and often incompatible communication practices. This study used a mixed-methods approach to examine a unique event series of public dialogues that brought together diverse community and academic perspectives around health equity issues. Findings suggest the series successfully merged strategies from both the knowledge mobilization and citizen engagement/public involvement domains to spark conversations in one community regarding health equity and social justice. We provide initial descriptive evidence that the format was successful in achieving its proximate goals, and was appreciated by those who participated and attended. We position this type of activity as a promising strategy to effectively bring academic research to the broader local community.

Keywords: knowledge mobilization, community-engaged scholarship, health equity, citizen engagement, mixed-methods research

Growing a healthy, vibrant, equitable city requires conversation, listening to others, challenging what we think we know.

—Survey Participant 42

Community-engaged research has emerged as a key priority of research funding agencies eager to demonstrate "impact," universities wishing to bridge "town and gown" (i.e., those affiliated with an academic institution versus the broader community in which it is located), and academics whose research goals include public awareness and community impact. However, activities in this space are not without tensions and challenges, including finding and defining mutual benefit and relevance for academic and community interests, and addressing power dynamics and often incompatible communication practices, among others (Wenger et al., 2012). This study examines a unique approach to acknowledging these tensions and bridging gaps via community–academic partnership in a series of public dialogues called City Symposium.

Background

In applied research domains in Canada, two related concepts have emerged as key to bridging research-to-action gaps. In the health sciences, knowledge translation (KT) is defined as "a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve . . . health . . . , provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system" (CIHR, n.d). Its close cousin from the social sciences and humanities, knowl-

edge mobilization (KMb), is "the reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts. . . ." (SSHRC, n.d.). (Note that CIHR's [2021] new strategic plan is now beginning to move away from the KT terminology, toward KMb.) Taken together, these definitions emphasize that for research-derived knowledge to be useful and impactful in the "real world," significant attention must be paid to how knowledge is framed, developed, prepared for, and shared with various kinds of audiences positioned to act on it.

Alongside this growing awareness, however, is the persistent knowledge-to-practice gap between what is known through research and what is implemented in health and social service policy and practice (Greenhalgh et al., 2016). One key development has been the more intentional inclusion—through integrated forms of knowledge translation/mobilization—of end users of research knowledge, and community stakeholders more broadly, in the research process (Graham et al., 2006; Kothari & Wathen, 2013, 2017). As Banner et al. (2019) emphasized, for research evidence to be relevant, it must be known, valued, and used by stakeholders. For complex problem spaces such as health inequities, the need for community-engaged approaches to developing and sharing actionable research is even greater (Banner et al., 2019; Wathen, 2022). Especially in these spaces, more passive or academically focused models of knowledge dissemination are being augmented by inclusive and transdisciplinary approaches that address complexity (Bowen & Graham, 2013) as a key way not only to create and implement better evidence-informed services and policies, but also to include, via community engagement (CE) strategies, service users and the general public in deciding how best to develop and use research-based approaches to service design and delivery (Banner et al., 2019; De Weger et al., 2018, 2020; Elsabbagh et al., 2014).

A Focus on the General Public as a Key Stakeholder

Most knowledge mobilization research has focused on specific groups of stakeholders, especially those planning and delivering programs and services, those in policy roles developing and funding services, and, more recently, those served or affected by a program or service, often termed "people with lived or living experience" (Bowen & Graham, 2013; De Weger et al., 2020). In health and social service research, less attention has been paid to sharing and discussing or codeveloping findings with a broader range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, the media, and the general public (as opposed to patients/service users; Liabo et al., 2020). Although broader public stakeholders can have important contributions, a challenge is the lack of institutional structures to support their role and the costs associated with enabling participation (Bowen et al., 2005). In their realist review of effective public involvement (PI), De Weger et al. (2018) identified a range of best practices, including (research/program) staff support and facilitative leadership based on transparency, a safe and trusting environment for input, citizens' early involvement, shared decision-making and governance, acknowledging and addressing power imbalances between citizens and professionals, seeking out and supporting those who feel they lack the skills and confidence to engage, finding quick wins, and taking into account actors' motivations. These practices overlap with strategies identified elsewhere in the community and citizen engagement literature, with an additional practice being attending to the idea of "critical mass"—that there are enough citizen voices to ensure that they are heard, and that they are not tokenistic, or that individuals are not made to feel they represent all possible communities, especially those facing structural marginalization and/or stigma (Bigby & Frawley, 2010; Camden et al., 2014; Cotterell, 2008; McGrath et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2005). Authentic engagement increases stakeholder awareness of the evidence, available resources, and their potential to influence processes that impact them and their communities. This is a key pathway to research uptake and impact.

City Symposium: A Unique Citizen-Focused Knowledge Mobilization Strategy

City Symposium (CS) was a series of public-facing events developed in partnership among two Western University faculties (Health Sciences and Information & Media Studies) and 10 community organizations in London, Ontario, Canada (community organization list available on the

CS website, https://citysymposium.com). The Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion (CRHESI, itself a university–community partnership) was the event funder, facilitator, and organizer. The primary goal of the CS series was to provide a "town square": a place where all citizens were invited to learn, ask questions, and encounter new perspectives. The nine events held in 2019 and 2020 each averaged between 125 and 250 attendees and included four speakers: an artist, a researcher, a civil servant, and an activist, who discussed a predetermined theme, selected to reflect the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, https://sdgs.un.org/goals) and of relevance to CRHESI's overarching theme of equity and inclusion. The nine topics were as follows: ending poverty, quality education, confronting anti-Black racism, work and employment, reducing inequalities, health and well-being, gender equality, sustainable cities, and responsible production and consumption.

From the perspective of the university partners, the goal of the series was to bring relevant health equity research into broader community discourse, but not in such a way as to monopolize the discussion. Embedding a presentation of current research alongside the diverse perspectives of the other three presenters positioned research as a part of, rather than the full solution to, complex global and local problems. The intent was to share research activity with the community in an engaging, constructive, and reciprocal environment, attending to the key strategies for engagement described above.

Prior to and immediately following each session, a local musician or spoken-word artist was invited to entertain the arriving/departing audience (in both online and in-person modes). After the host introduced the format and topic, each speaker was allotted 12 minutes to present their perspective. We asked every presenter to tell a story about their work—that is, to speak in a narrative arc, and provide a call to action such that attendees were given tangible and constructive next steps to consider. At the conclusion of each presentation, a member of the host team would conduct a short "on stage" interview with the speaker, to help attendees make explicit links between what they just heard and the question, "What can I do?"

In the pre-COVID-19 period, the series moved locations throughout London (libraries, museum, theatres, etc.). In March 2020, the program shifted online. Given the ever-changing themes, locations, and presenter lineups, a "host team" cohosted each event. This team of three individuals provided a consistent presence and face of the series, across events. Videos of each session are available on the CS website (https://citysymposium.com/video/).

Research Question

Although literature in the field of knowledge translation/mobilization has continued to expand, most of the focus has been on practice and policy applications of research evidence, with less emphasis on strategies to move research-based knowledge to the public, or to blend academically derived knowledge with the lived and living experience and tacit knowledge of civil society and the broader public. Thus, City Symposium is a unique model, engaging a large group of citizens over the course of 2 years. This study provides a unique opportunity to begin to fill an important research gap.

We posed an overall research question: How effective was CS as a community co-led and public-engagement-oriented knowledge mobilization strategy? Specifically, we asked: (1) What were the impacts of CS for attendees, presenters, and partners? (2) What features and delivery modes (in online and in-person delivery) were seen as effective, and why? and (3) How can CS be improved?

Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach and was approved by Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (Protocol #119114).

Sampling and Recruitment

Interviews With Partners and Presenters

Participating CS partners were recruited from the group of 14 project liaisons, 10 of which were partnering community organizations (library, arts organization, theatre, museum, etc.) and four of which were partnering university/college units. Participating CS presenters were recruited from the list of 38 presenters from the nine CS sessions, including academics, artists, advocates, and public servants. The CS coordinator (JS, also a research team member) contacted all part-

ners and presenters by email asking if they were interested in completing an interview. Interested partners and presenters received a Letter of Information, returned it by email, and were then contacted by another team member to schedule an interview.

Survey of Attendees

To recruit survey participants, the CS coordinator used a list of 1,338 email addresses collected from registration information from individuals who had attended one or more CS sessions. The recruitment email contained a link where attendees could read the Letter of Information and continue to the online survey if interested in participating.

Data Collection

Interviews

Two research team members conducted semistructured interviews with partners and presenters. The interviews were completed from October through December 2021 and lasted 15–20 minutes. The interview questions addressed (1) reasons for involvement, (2) number/type of sessions attended, (3) impacts of involvement on thinking and behavior, (4) overall effectiveness and effective features of CS, (5) suggestions for improvement, and (6) whether or not (and why) they would or did recommend CS to others. All interviews were audiorecorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim by the two team members.

Surveys

In addition to demographic questions, the online survey asked participants to (1) rank 10 aspects of CS from 1 (*most important*) to 10 (*least important*), (2) rate seven impacts of CS on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and (3) indicate, from a list, which "community-builders" (i.e., local organizations, services, or locations, e.g., museum, theatre, arts council) they were more aware of as a result of CS. Survey participants were also asked to provide write-in responses to elaborate on their experiences with CS, its impacts (on the city and on themselves, e.g., their learning, work, etc.), and suggestions for improvement (including CS topic suggestions). All participants completed the survey in August 2021.

Coding and Analysis

Write-in comments from the survey and qualitative interview data were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with a blended deductive (i.e., predefined codes linked to research questions) and inductive (i.e., creation of codes not anticipated at the outset) approach. After reading and rereading the interview data, two team members independently created preliminary codebooks. The codebooks were reviewed and discussed with a third team member, resulting in a single consolidated version. This codebook was applied gradually to the interview data, and the three team members conferred at intervals to allow for an iterative process of revision, as needed. The two team members applied the same codebook to the written survey responses, and no further revisions were needed. Finally, the coded documents were compared and a third team member settled any disagreements. All coded text was arranged by code in a separate document for ease of analysis. The last author read and reread the quotes, pulling across themes as needed to answer the research questions. All authors were involved in the selection of sample quotes for presentation in this article.

The two team members also applied closed codes to the interviews in order to describe (1) the number of sessions attended, (2) whether participants attended both in-person and online sessions and what their preferred mode of delivery was, (3) whether they thought CS was generally effective, and (4) whether they would or did recommend CS to others. Similar to the qualitative coding process, the team members compared their codes and a third team member was consulted when agreement could not be reached.

The quantitative survey data and interview closed codes were analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) in SPSS Version 28.

Results

Participants

Of the 12 interview participants, four were partners and eight were presenters. Demographic information was not collected from interview participants. Interviews lasted 15–20 minutes on average. Most interview participants (n = 10, 83.3%) had attended two or more sessions (for presenters, this included the one at which they presented), including at least one of each delivery mode.

Of the 48 survey participants, most were women, including transwomen (n = 36, 75%). Others were male, including transmen (n = 8, 16.7%); nonbinary (n = 1, 2.1%); or did not specify (n = 3, 6.3%). The most commonly represented age group was 55+ (n = 20, 41.7%). Most survey participants had attended two CS sessions (n = 20, 41.7%); the average was 2.6 (SD = 1.36; range = 1–7). As partners and presenters were also on the attendee email list, individuals could have contributed data via both survey and interview; however, the existence or degree of this overlap is unknown because survey participation was anonymous.

Due to overall commonalities in questions and their intent in the survey and interviews, findings are presented in integrated thematic domains across the data sets.

Positive Impacts

Overall, both survey and interview participants were very positive about CS. All survey items regarding its impacts were rated above 4 on average (Table 1), and responses of disagreement (i.e., 3 and under) were infrequent. A number of specific positive impacts of CS were described by interview and survey participants; these are described below.

Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices

The impact most highly endorsed by survey participants was "The City Symposium has exposed me to new ideas" (Table 1). In line with this finding, one of the most common impacts described by both participant groups was increased awareness and understanding. These comments often related to equity or the specific CS topics. Representative survey participant responses included, "Broadly speaking, I have become more attuned to the ongoing issues of our community . . . homelessness, food security and racial challenges" (Survey26) and "What stood out to me was how honest the conversation [was] and how it pertained to the local community. Having the local lens and representation put into perspective how these issues are happening right here in London" (Survey28).

Although more common among survey participants, interview participants also described this impact. For example, one presenter said, "I think too, like on a personal note, anytime you have an opportunity to share your experience with an audience or within community, you learn something" (Presenter3).

This theme also presented in the many comments about the "different perspectives" that attendees (and presenters/partners) were exposed to at the sessions. In addition to being discussed as an effective feature of CS (see Effective Features and Modes of Delivery section, below), the varying viewpoints brought forth by the different speakers, and any subsequent discussion, were also seen to broaden people's understandings of the topics and/or their community. For example, one survey participant (Survey36) wrote, "It offers new perspectives and voices to London's public scene,

Table 1. Impacts of City Symposium, Attendee Survey Mean Ratings

City Symposium Impact Item (n)	Mean	SD
The City Symposium helps make London a better place to live. (45)	5.58	1.215
The City Symposium has influenced my personal choices. (40)	5.10	1.297
The City Symposium has influenced my professional choices. (30)	4.67	1.668
The City Symposium has influenced the way I work or study. (33)	4.61	1.435
The City Symposium has exposed me to new ideas. (47)	5.87	1.209
The City Symposium has introduced me to new people or networks. (43)	5.28	1.386
The City Symposium has had other impacts on me. (29)	4.86	1.217

Note. Respondents rated impacts of CS on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

and changes and challenges the dialogue of our community." Another (Survey47) wrote, "I think the world today causes us to stay in our own bubbles of influence, surrounded by people who agree with us. I think City Symposium helps expose you to different perspectives on a given topic." Finally, multiple interview participants noted that the voices heard at CS were ones they normally wouldn't hear, for example,

> I get involved in a lot of research and supervision . . . but I'm not involved personally, in doing a collaborative project with [the] community. . . . I don't get the same level of interaction or level of exposure is a better word, I think, to the experiences of those who live in the community. Right? So I particularly grew and benefited from the community members who were part of those sessions. (Presenter1)

As another presenter said:

> One of the researchers spoke about her work with migrant workers. That's a perspective that I don't have access to firsthand. And based on the feedback she provided from her participants, I was really . . . I still, still remember that presentation. And how impactful it was. (Partner2)

Although not as prevalent a theme, some participants did discuss changes in attitudes because of CS. For example, this survey participant changed their views after attending the session on confronting anti-Black racism: "I look much less to my friends and colleagues of colour to teach me about antiracism work, and am more likely to recognize that this is my responsibility. . . ." (Survey41). Some interview participants noted no or little change in their awareness or attitudes. For some, this was because their work was already related to the topic. Others noted having their existing beliefs reinforced, for example,

> I think if anything, it just strengthened my commitment to that kind of work and to the need for us to be creating opportunities for dialogue for people coming from various different sectors, including people of lived experiences. (Presenter2)

Although specific instances of behavior change were less evident, one interview participant did note that CS influenced their approach to teaching:

> So I think I have become better at being somebody who brings up these critical issues and initiates conversations with my graduate students, in terms of research, and the decisions we make as researchers, and the responsibilities we have to our community, and I think that's in part because of the series. (Presenter1)

Similarly, this person spoke about considering changes in their work and personal life:

> I can't remember exactly what, but I remember like afterwards talking with my partner and being like, we should do this differently, and at work I should do this because it would be more equitable. So, I would say it didn't change my mind, but it maybe gave me more ideas about what we could do differently. (Partner3)

Other common ways in which people's behavior was influenced by CS included changing how or what they communicated with others (e.g., using different terminology or sharing information they had learned at CS) and making an effort to educate themselves further after CS. For example, one survey participant (Survey33) noted, "I am retired, but the symposiums have led me to read or follow other related topics . . . [and given me] increased confidence to attend public forums."

Finally, some participants described the *potential* for action because of CS, as this series of quotes indicates:

> I think we have to trust in the idea that where conversation can happen around how we can do things differently, eventually things will be done differently. So I think it's important. (Presenter4)

> City Symposium offers space to engage in discussions about important social justice concerns and opportunity to walk away from the event with practical ways of actively engaging in justice work. (Survey41)

> By bringing together people who are curious about the same thing and introducing them to each other and to people with expertise, local collective knowledge is increased and opportunities for collective action for change may be generated. (Survey9)

Making Connections and Expanding Reach

Interview and survey participants said that a key benefit of CS was the opportunity to make connections, often through informal networking before or after (usually in-person) sessions. For some, this meant meeting new people or feeling a sense of community at the event itself. For example, one participant (Survey34) wrote, "As a person who is fairly new to the city, it has given me some way to connect to others and continue my personal development." Another observed,

> So you see people there you know, you get to meet new people, you feel that sense of community, and that that sense of support that we were so used to getting, you know, in a one-on-one environment, right, and, and it's very energizing, and it's very . . . it instills a sense of community that I really appreciate. (Presenter1)

Others reported the potentially more lasting impacts of breaking down barriers and forming relationships. For example, one said, "I think there's so much merit to creating a forum where we can bridge divides and cross sectors and bring people together who don't often come together to talk about issues" (Presenter2). Another interview participant commented on relationships:

> City Symposium as an example, allowed for me to start building relationships with people in the community who are working in this area, and that's I think, really been helpful through the pandemic to continue to build those relationships. Public health has been at the core of the COVID response for the community, but you know, we only do so when engaged with partners and with other leaders. (Presenter4)

Related to the opportunity to form new interconnections was the ability to also help stakeholders, broadly defined, expand their networks with an explicit eye to equity, especially by making both on- and offline venues accessible.

> So, it provided the audience with lots of different perspectives that they would not normally get from a traditional session. And it also is probably a good way of attracting a broader audience, because each one of those groups you just described has their own audience. So now you actually have the potential of having four audiences combined. (Presenter8)

Community Knowledge

On average, participants were more aware of different community organizations and resources (i.e., "community-builders"; M = 3.67, SD = 3.74, range = 0–13) because of attending CS. Less than a quarter (n = 11, 22.9%) checked off no community-builders (although it is not clear whether they were not more aware of any or simply skipped the question). This increased awareness of community resources was described by an interview participant: "What was fantastic for me was to hear about what these organizations are doing about it. You know, how to actually help support them and just get to know a little bit more about what these organizations offer" (Presenter6).

Partner- and Presenter-Specific Impacts

Overall, partners and presenters reported many of the same positive impacts of CS as attendees. However, they described a few additional benefits associated with their specific involvement. For example, partners appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with other partners: "I think that cosponsorship and collaboration are the bomb, like that's what makes it worth doing" (Partner4), and one partner reported that it helped them learn about a public engagement format that they could use in their own work. Benefits unique to presenters included personal fulfillment from participating (e.g., because the topic was important), the chance to share their work with others, and the opportunity for personal growth by speaking at a public event. Finally, both partners and presenters appreciated that involvement in CS was not onerous, the opportunity to share their work with others, the ability to achieve organizational goals through CS, and that they could raise awareness of their organization/service to the London commu-

nity. With regard to the latter benefit, one presenter noted, "I thought it was a fantastic opportunity to continue providing public education. It is one of our mandates . . . the symposium [topic] actually met the needs of our program . . ." (Presenter6). Similarly, a partner said,

> I thought it was a really good opportunity to highlight the work of [organization] and also to kind of . . . for community members to learn about it and ask questions and learn who's responsible for that project, and who to contact. I just thought it was a really good opportunity to kind of get out there and, you know, to place our project. (Partner1)

Effective Features and Modes of Delivery

Most interview participants found CS to have been effective in general (n = 11, 91.7%; one missing). All interview participants would and/or did recommend CS to others and when asked about who in particular, or who target audiences should be, the most common response was that CS could be beneficial for "everyone" or "anyone." The features of CS ranked by importance by survey participants are presented in Table 2. By far the most important feature on average was "bringing together different perspectives around a common theme." Both interview and survey participants frequently mentioned exposure to different points of view as an effective feature of CS. For example, one interview participant (Partner1) said it was useful "to have like, the different perspectives because, you know, my day-to-day work doesn't necessarily provide me with that. So, it was nice to see one topic, but kind of coming at it from different angles." At the same time, several participants also noted that it was beneficial to have an opportunity for like-minded people to get together. For example, one survey participant (Survey2) wrote, "It's good to have events in the city where people from the community can come together around a shared interest/common goal." One interviewee commented:

> And I just think it's such an important, good way to address issues from those different vantage points of the academic and the community person, etc. I just think, you know, we all come with different biases and assumptions and different ways of thinking about and addressing

Table 2. Features of City Symposium, Attendee Survey, Mean Rankings (n = 48)

Feature of City Symposium	Mean ranking	*SD*
Bringing together different perspectives around a common theme (academic, activism & philanthropy, arts & culture, public sector)	1.73	1.410
Live music or artistic performances	6.58	2.181
Videos available online for watching later	5.65	2.139
Speaker follow-up questions and interview with event hosts	4.04	1.890
Different venues for live events	7.42	1.900
Event themes (tied to the Sustainable Development Goals)	3.42	2.009
Postevent snacks and refreshments (pre-COVID events)	8.77	1.276
Local, London-based speakers	4.25	2.436
Email newsletter profiles of event themes and presenters	6.63	2.321
Opportunity for informal networking or collaboration	6.52	2.790

Note. Lower scores indicate higher importance ranking.

> issues. So, creating a forum where you can share what those are and what's the commonality among those is great. (Presenter2)

Other successful or appreciated features of CS reported by participants included its innovative format; good organization; high-quality facilitators and presenters; inclusion of artistic performances; safe/supportive space; important and timely topics; action-oriented focus; opportunities for audience engagement; and broad community promotion. A number of these features are described in the following quote:

> It's pretty novel. I mean obviously I do a lot of panel stuff so you know, conference panels, podcast panels or things like that. But in terms of that like intentionality around local expertise and the mix of the four [presenters], having some Q&A and having some informal social time after, I mean that's . . . all of that formula is pretty novel. (Presenter7)

In terms of preferences for the mode of delivery, most interview participants (n = 8, 72.7%) preferred in-person sessions; the remainder had no clear preference (survey participants were not specifically asked about their format preferences). Many spoke about there being benefits and drawbacks to both the in-person and online formats. Disadvantages of the online format included the limited capacity for discussion and networking and that the musical/spoken word entertainment did not work as well remotely. Advantages of the online format included greater accessibility from home and the potential for those outside the city to attend. Nevertheless, an interview participant noted,

> I think if you're interested in the topic, and you have a passion for it, it doesn't matter how it's delivered or who is delivering it. So, for me, if the speakers are good, if the topic is being addressed in a way that's relatable, then whether you're in person or watching online, it does not matter. (Presenter9)

Improving City Symposium

Few limitations or criticisms of CS were mentioned by participants. Despite a relatively low importance ranking for the "opportunity for informal networking or collaboration" (Table 2), one of the more common criticisms had to do with insufficient discussion or attendee engagement. For example, one survey participant (Survey19) wrote, "There was not enough time for engaged Q&A at the one I attended." However, not all participants shared this opinion. In the words of one interview participant (Presenter7), "I'm not sure any more public engagement directly would be very helpful, so I think having some informal gathering after is great if the public want more interaction."

Others noted that the promotion of CS could be improved or that the reach or audience of the sessions was limited. For example, one interview participant said,

> The biggest limitation is that the participants in these types of sessions are . . . how do we balance the preaching to the converted, preaching of the choir type of thing? Right, so people that are participating in these events are people that are already thinking and engaging . . . doesn't mean that there's not value in having venues and avenues for people to connect and to discuss because that's where action can be generated. (Presenter4)

A few participants had suggestions related to the voices heard at CS. For example, one survey participant (Survey11) advocated for "less big-name speakers like city councillors and CEOs. I want to hear from Londoners actually doing the work on the ground everyday." An interview participant said,

> I think for the most part, the one thing I find generally at most events like this is lived experiences is usually missed. That being said, I think City Symposium did a pretty good job of trying to include lived experiences as much as possible, but I think we can always do better. (Partner3)

Finally, many survey participants responded to the question about suggested future CS topics. Their ideas included food security and sustainability, mental health and addictions, housing, climate action and eco-justice, issues related to Indigenous Peoples such as Land Back and reconciliation, labor issues, various types of prejudice and dis-

crimination (e.g., racism, ageism, ableism), community development, and poverty and homelessness.

Discussion

> Whether you are an advocate, or whether you're doing research, we can all contribute . . . towards reducing inequalities.
>
> —Presenter6

City Symposium was unique in that it attempted to achieve two related, but distinct, goals—engaging the public about the subject of equity and how to consider strategies for change tied to a specific locale, while also providing a venue for knowledge mobilization for researchers and community organizations partnering to reduce inequities. CS thus provided the opportunity to bring together strategies from two fields—citizen engagement/public involvement and knowledge translation/mobilization—to plan and assess what could happen when these spaces were opened in an accessible way to an entire community.

In reflecting on the findings from our mixed-methods evaluation, and the literature from these domains, including best practices in each, we find a reasonable fit to many of the key drivers of both CE/PI and KMb, which may account for the generally positive impacts we achieved, as evidenced through our data. From the perspective of integrated KT/KMb, we used most of the practices found effective by De Weger et al. (2018) in their review, especially staff support and facilitative leadership, community/partner involvement in early planning and throughout, a safe and trusting environment for input, attending to issues of power and providing a level ground for a diversity of perspectives, and using ways to communicate where everyone was afforded due respect and no voices (among presenters) were privileged over any others. We also looked for mutual benefit by focusing on expectations, motivations, and what success would look like for all involved. Similarly, the breadth of participants in formal presentations, facilitation, entertainment, and the audience itself meant that we achieved a level of critical mass, with participation across various walks of life—people felt engaged for what they had to contribute, not by virtue of occupying a specific role (Bigby & Frawley, 2010; Camden et al., 2014; Cotterell, 2008; De Weger et al., 2018; McGrath et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2005).

In addition, City Symposium provided participants the opportunity to form new interconnections and to expand their networks with an explicit eye to equity—making both online and in-person venues more accessible in multiple ways, including through careful use of nontechnical or non-jargon-filled language (though not, for this series, use of non-English languages, nor simultaneous translation or signing; however, we did use closed captioning for online sessions). These intentional strategies to break down barriers between experts and nonexperts, and between various communities, made CS well-regarded among those who participated in the study. Overall, most participants felt that CS was an open space where presenters and attendees engaged in discussion and were mutually involved in knowledge sharing, although it should be noted that the extent of discussion between presenters and attendees was limited, especially for the virtual sessions, when postevent informal discussion over refreshments was not possible (as it was for in-person events). Participants especially noted the benefits of having different types of speakers bring their perspectives to each topic. Presenters shared their expert and tacit knowledge and lived/living experiences with the audience rather than just the kind of decontextualized research findings often found in academically focused dissemination. The emphasis on storytelling was especially impactful and aligns with emerging calls to engage multiple discursive strategies drawn from media, journalism, and communication practices, especially avoiding technical terms and disciplinary jargon when sharing research-based knowledge with diverse audiences (Jerit, 2009; Luzón, 2013). Indeed, storytelling has received attention recently from KT researchers and practitioners and is shown to be effective in changing health-promoting behaviors (Brooks et al., 2022; Wathen, 2022); further research in the context of CE/PI is needed.

Also, although web-based platforms had not been fully embraced as public engagement tools until the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were forced to change to this format, participants appreciated the flexibility and accessibility this mode of delivery provided. Ongoing virtual spaces for these types of multistakeholder engagement have the potential to enable knowledge mobiliza-

tion activities by reducing barriers (i.e., eliminating distance, time, and cost as participation barriers) while also increasing opportunities for inclusion (e.g., allowing more people to be involved by enabling participation for those with mobility or other limitations, or who live outside London). Respondents stressed a desire to preserve these benefits by continuing to include these virtual options beyond the pandemic. More research is needed to evaluate the impacts of online approaches on community/public engagement and on KMb activities.

Gradinger et al. (2015) reviewed the literature on PI in health and social care research, finding that most knowledge-sharing goals are articulated in terms of one (or more) of three values systems. The first system is focused on normative values, specifically moral, ethical, and political concerns, with the goal of enhancing rights and fostering empowerment, and a focus on action and accountability. The second they term "substantive values," in which actors focus on the impact of research on communities, including effectiveness, generalizability, and creating a reliable evidence base. The third focuses on process values, including trust, partnership, honesty, and clarity. Reflecting on our intent when designing CS, and how we conducted the series, including accommodating pandemic-induced changes, the overarching value brought to the work was explicitly normative: to promote equity and social justice. However, this goal could be achieved only through process-specific values, with a focus on partnership and communication. Our findings indicate that we achieved our process value goals, positioning CS as one strategy in our local community that reinforces a collaborative approach to social justice and equity goals, though by no means a sufficient one (i.e., whether we promoted specific normative changes is largely unknown, though a few participants spoke of actions they have undertaken or might undertake). However, the ability to demonstrate a substantive "evidence base" remains unclear. This study is a contribution to an evolving set of strategies for mobilizing research to action, but each community is unique, and whether a CS model would work in other communities is unknown; additional research on these types of KMb/CE/PI strategies is required.

Limitations

The extent to which we were able to draw in individuals and groups facing deep and intersecting forms of marginalization was limited, at least in terms of study participation. Although we did not collect a full range of demographic data in the survey, we know that our sample achieved reasonable gender diversity but the majority of participants were, for example, older. The online, English-only survey may also have limited people's ability to participate in the evaluation. Yet, contrary to the survey demographics, our anecdotal impressions of the audiences across events indicated a greater degree of diversity among attendees than was reflected among those who chose to complete the survey (for example, in age—most survey respondents were older, but audiences varied, especially in the online sessions, among the faces we could see). There was good diversity across a number of social locations among those with formal roles in CS, including presenters, entertainers, and hosts/facilitators. When topics were specifically about inclusion, this was an added emphasis—for example, after an early online session was "Zoom-bombed" with horrific racist attacks, we engaged with Black colleagues and partners in a critical learning moment, and collectively decided to add a new session specific to anti-Black racism, led by these colleagues (Bringi & Atkins, 2020).

Regardless, self-selection bias may limit the generalizability of our results, as those who felt particularly positively toward CS may have been more motivated to participate in this research. We also could not determine from our data whether satisfaction differed between academic and nonacademic attendees. Additional methods of follow-up, as well as more intentional strategies to further encourage and support participation (as audience members, presenters, and partners) from historically marginalized and equity-deserving groups, would enhance these kinds of events, and a breadth of inclusive research methodologies would improve our ability to evaluate them. For example, of those who agreed to an interview, there were fewer partners than presenters, and no artist presenters. This result may speak to the need to fairly compensate interview participants for their time, as those in precarious work roles would find it harder to participate, especially during work hours. As well, we had a relatively small survey sample, and chose not to collect fulsome demographics, limiting our ability to truly know the respondents. Our data also prevented in-depth examination

of the acceptability and effectiveness of in-person versus online formats (i.e., we do not know which format survey participants attended). Although such pedagogical issues have been examined across disciplines and contexts, and a fulsome discussion is beyond the scope of this research, a better understanding of these formats in the context of CE/PI such as CS would be beneficial. The relatively long interval between some of the sessions and the survey (ranging from about nine months to >2.5 years) may explain the relatively short duration of the interviews; additional methods to better understand the impact of CS on attendees are required. These methods could, for example, include postsession focus groups or interviews occurring immediately following the event and at reasonable intervals to understand how impacts unfold.

Conclusions

Although, as a field of practice and study, we might not yet be fully "there" in engaging citizens as a core audience and partner (Banner et al., 2019) in generating and using knowledge, City Symposium successfully merged strategies from both the KMb and the CE/PI domains to mount a multievent series, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, to spark important conversations in one community regarding equity and social justice. This study provides initial descriptive evidence that the format was successful in achieving its proximate goals, and is one appreciated by those who participated and attended, and chose to engage in the research. We position this type of activity as a promising strategy to bridge "town and gown" in a way that is codeveloped by a range of community partners, including academic institutions as one among many, rather than one apart.

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About the Authors

C. Nadine Wathen, PhD, FCAHS, *is full professor and Canada Research Chair in Mobilizing Knowledge on Gender-Based Violence in the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing at Western University, and academic director of the Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion. Nadine's research examines the health and social service sector response to gender-based violence, interventions to reduce health inequities, and the science of knowledge mobilization.*

James Shelley *directs the Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Lab at Western University. His research interests focus on the intersection of complexity theory, information, and communications, with a particular emphasis on developing systems-informed approaches to knowledge mobilization.*

Makayla N. Gomes *is a project coordinator at the Centre for Effective Practice (CEP). Makayla's expertise lies in evidence-based health care and knowledge translation, focusing on bridging evidence-to-practice gaps. She received her bachelor's in health science and master's in health information science at Western University.*

Aya Mohamed *is a project coordinator at Canadian Institute for Health Information. Her research interests focus on the use of data to accelerate improvements in health care, health system performance, and population health across Canada. She received her master's in health information science from Western University.*

Jennifer C. D. MacGregor *is senior research associate in the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing at Western University and community research associate at Western's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. Her research areas include intimate partner violence, trauma- and violence-informed care, and systematic review methodologies. Jennifer earned her PhD in social psychology from the University of Waterloo.*

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