

# **Community Scholars Program Developmental Evaluation Final Report**

**A Bridge to Access Research  
for Community Scholars**

**Dr. Andrea Whiteley**

September 2020

This research was made possible through a postdoctoral research Accelerate Grant from the Mitacs organization, with funding and support from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, Simon Fraser University Library, and the ScholCommLab



This report describes the results of the evaluation of the Community Scholars Program undertaken from January – June 2020. The evaluation consisted of a survey distributed to all Community Scholars Program (CSP) participants (109 completed, also known as “Community Scholars”); 19 in-depth interviews; and informal conversations with the librarians involved in the creation, funding, and day-to-day management of the program. Two non-profit organizations, the United Way and Mitacs, sponsored the research, which allowed for the hiring of Dr. Andrea Whiteley, a post-doctoral researcher working with Dr. Juan Pablo Alperin from the ScholCommLab at Simon Fraser University. The central purpose of this project was to evaluate how CSP participants are using or benefitting from improved access to research provided by the CSP, gather feedback from participants regarding their use of this resource, and provide guidance for future development and priorities that will support greater impact and sustainability for the program. The final report details the background of the CSP, discusses the themes and recommendations that emerged from the research, outlines the methodology, and presents the detailed research results.

**Suggested Citation**

Whiteley, A. (2020). *Community Scholars Program Developmental Evaluation Final Report: A Bridge to Access Research for Community Scholars*. ScholCommLab: Simon Fraser University.

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### Other supporting documents (sent as separate files)

- List of participating individuals and organizations in the research
- Interview research memos
- Interview research transcripts
- CSP Survey data (Excel file)

# I. Background of the Community Scholars Program

The CSP is a unique initiative that provides free academic research access for 500 participants working in community and non-profit organizations across British Columbia. The program was founded through a partnership between the [United Way of the Lower Mainland](#), [Mindset Social Innovation Foundation](#), and the [Simon Fraser University](#) (SFU) Library. Three other university libraries have joined the program including Thompson Rivers University (TRU), Vancouver Island University (VIU), and University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC)<sup>1</sup>. Now in its fourth year, the program was created in 2016 to address the problem of access to research outside of the academic community. The Community Scholars program is unique in Canada as it removes access barriers to research journal articles for not for profit and community organizations and answers a need for publicly funded research knowledge to flow to citizens to promote greater research impact.

This innovative program was the brainchild of Gwen Bird, Simon Fraser University's Dean of Libraries, and Graham Dover, a PhD graduate at SFU. In 2014, Dr. Dover (Graham) was an alumnus working for a non-profit organization, The Mindset Social Innovation Foundation. Graham wrote a letter to the then president of Simon Fraser University, Dr. Andrew Petter. Graham was frustrated by his lack of research database access once he graduated and argued that many organizations that serve the public could benefit from access to university-produced research. The President agreed and introduced Graham to Gwen who, according to Graham, was "surprised" that someone working in the community would want university research access. Graham pointed out the disconnect between the university and the community when it comes to access to research:

Even at this stage, the thinking was there's a deficit for community leaders because they're not accessing research that could really help them. And there's a deficit for academia, because they're not realizing that in the community, we're ahead of them in many, many ways.

Gwen also informed Graham that there is no simple answer to providing research access to people outside of the university, because of the complexity of the academic publishing industry and intellectual property concerns. Gwen and Graham worked together to envision a solution. With seed funding from the United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Mindset Foundation, the Community Scholars Program started in 2016 with an initial cohort of 100 individuals, and an agreement with the scholarly publishers, Sage and Springer, to allow for free access to their research journals. This first phase of the project saw spots filled "by word of mouth in two days", according to Gwen.

During the initial set-up, the organizers noticed that participants ranged in ability and experience. Some participants were competent and knew how to navigate a research portal.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the writing of this report, University of British Columbia's library has joined the team as a sponsoring partner. Thompson River University joined the program and contributed funding towards it but has recently left.

Some participants may have had post-secondary research training, but their skills needed updating. Finally, some needed more basic help navigating the internet. As a result, the program secured funding for a librarian to help scholars navigate the resource, troubleshoot, and manage the program. Heather de Forest has been involved in the program, working out of the SFU campus since the beginning of the program. Kate Shuttleworth recently took over during the 2019-2020 academic year, while Heather was on sabbatical.

Since then, the program has expanded to include three more universities, received additional funding from the McConnell Foundation's BC Collaborative on Social Infrastructure Program, made agreements with five additional publishers for a total of seven, and provided access and support for 500 participants. The CSP portal provides access to more than 20,000 titles including journals, e-books, and reference works. The participating publishers are:

- SAGE Publishing
- Duke University Press
- Wiley-Blackwell
- Taylor & Francis Group
- Oxford University Press
- Cambridge University Press
- Springer Nature

Each participating university also allocated librarian time to assist with the project locally.<sup>2</sup> These librarians recruit, train, and support Community Scholars in their respective geographic areas surrounding Thompson Rivers University (TRU), Vancouver Island University (VIU), and University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Currently, the librarians working for the CSP at other locations are Kealin McCabe (UNBC), Dana McFarland (VIU), and Aleha McCauley (UBC). The CSP librarians are also involved in the creation and administration of workshops, events, and journal club meetings delivered in person and online.

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<sup>2</sup> The CSP librarians are full-time librarians who devote some of their time to the program. The librarians at UNBC and VIU are supported by the McConnell Foundation grant, and TRU made an in-kind donation for their librarian's time.

## II. Research Analysis Summary and Recommendations

This analysis describes ten key features of the Community Scholars Program, derived from consultations with the program participants—the Community Scholars—and discussions with the CSP librarians and SFU Dean of Libraries, Gwen Bird. This evaluation process also involved understanding the broad social context of the program. Recommendations following each of the features reflect both the data gathering process and the “developmental evaluation” approach, the purpose of which is to provide feedback and guide further development, while taking into account the complexity and innovation of the program. During the course of this evaluation, the researchers also shared informal research results and data analysis with the CSP librarians, as part of the research team. The following analysis and recommendations have grown out of the many ideas that were exchanged, discussed and even implemented, as the CSP librarians reacted nimbly to information and ideas gleaned from the Community Scholars throughout the evaluation.

### 1. *Demonstrated program impact*

One of the main motivations for carrying out this developmental evaluation was to understand what kind of impact the program was having on Community Scholars and their organizations. Overwhelmingly, the interviews and survey confirmed that the CSP was having direct and indirect impact for program participants, their organizations, and for the constituencies they serve. The evaluation process described in this report identified the *educational* impact of workshops and training on the participants themselves as well as the *research* impact, as the participants used the programs’ access to research in service to their constituent communities. This section traces some of the many instances of the CSP’s positive effects, each of which is an excellent indicator of the success of the program.

First and foremost, the CSP impacts participants in a personal way. As Community Scholars access research and learn from the various CSP workshops or journal clubs, they report being able to do things they may not have been able to do otherwise. Participants shared that being a Community Scholar yielded professional development experience, and explicitly mentioned experiencing positive impacts, such as improving their ability to make presentations, create programs for clientele, and stay abreast of research. Some reported these benefits came through learning specific skills, such as how to search a database using keywords or Boolean operators, how to cite research, or find statistics online; while others reported they were through enhanced understanding or knowledge in their fields.

The impact of the CSP on individual scholars also reverberated in the community and in the non-profit organizations where Community Scholars are employed. By contributing to the professional development of employees, organizations were able to tap into a research base for successful grant funding applications, participate in legal challenges, enhance their ability to deliver evidence-based programs, and create research and new knowledge in their fields.

That is, the CSP enabled the employees at participating organizations to succeed while also contributing to organizations being able to fulfill their missions.

In this way, the CSP has also had an impact on society at large, as it enabled publicly funded research produced at universities to be used by practitioners working in their fields. The survey and interviews gathered stories about how Community Scholars were able to improve services for people with disabilities, understand youth at risk, and advocate for the vulnerable in society. Some Scholars reported sharing research information more widely with their organization's volunteers, training others in innovative program delivery methods, such as: how to understand dementia, how to support someone in hospice, or how to support seniors who are caregivers for their grandkids. Even more broadly, given that the types of community and non-profit organizations that participated in the program have the expressed mission of serving the public, and that the CSP supported employees in serving those missions, the CSP has indirectly contributed to improved outcomes for the citizens served by them.

**Recommendations:** The wide-ranging impact of the CSP remains unknown to many of the key stakeholders: Community Scholars, funders of the program, publishers, participating universities, the scholarly community in general, and the public. This points to an opportunity—and need—for greater communication of the program activities and impacts among these groups, all of whom have a stake in the success of this program as it stands. Communication could take the form of an impact report that is shared with university administrators, publishers, and the CSP community. In addition, the CSP website could include a page that highlights for visitors the many ways that the program is benefitting participants.

To support this type of communication, the CSP should set up a mandatory annual survey or lightweight evaluation process to gather information about the impact of the program, as seen through the eyes of the Community Scholars.

## *2. Professional development and lifelong learning*

Conversations with Community Scholars revealed that their current professional development experiences were not as robust or supportive as they could be, and that the CSP was filling this critical gap in their professional lives. Many indicated that being a part of the program enhanced their understanding, supported their research, motivated them to learn more about an issue in their profession, and in at least one case, encouraged them to pursue further post-secondary education.

Participants described how their organizations, and generally many organizations in the non-profit sector, rely on externally organized workshops and seminars to give employees insights into new theories or ideas in their fields. A couple of Community Scholars critiqued this approach for not providing enough depth for them. Others commented that, in non-profit organizations, "their learning is generally either through their experience, which is fantastic but is limited to their story, or it's through journals that they would get, not academic journals.

It would be just an article they read" (Interview 5). One Community Scholar felt that generally, "any training comes from best practices that are taught by experts in that field. They may do their own research, but there's lots of non-accredited professional development" (Interview 6).

Access to journal articles attends to participants' professional development needs both through what one CSP journal club discussion termed "group study" and "self-study". The portal provides access to research that could supplement their understanding beyond what a workshop might provide, but some scholars preferred the "group study" format of the journal club which they felt offered direction for professionals that might not have the time or experience to know what they should choose to study:

The portal is just one of the channels for us to learn from, but it's not the most user-friendly, because you have to direct your own learning, and you have to know what you want to learn. Whereas, what some of our issues as learners is that we don't know what we should be learning, especially if it's something new. So we want somebody else to guide [us], to tell us, "This is a good article."

As hinted at in the above quote, not all participants in the program feel adequately equipped to make use of the portal or the research therein. Although over 60% of Community Scholars who participated in this evaluation have graduate level education (and thus are necessarily familiar with research), many of them expressed an interest in receiving further research-related education. The feedback gathered from the survey and interviews indicates that Scholars needed "refresher courses", especially for topical information like how to carry out community-based research, how to use Boolean search terms, how to analyze research data, or where to find particular scholarly resources. The evaluation also uncovered a need for research literacy more broadly, as non-profit organizations are challenged by funders—and their own staff—to implement evidenced based practices, conduct research on program impacts, and understand the research landscape of their respective disciplines.

The desire by participants for additional guidance and training in research skills was also made evident by some participants feeling intimidated by the word "scholar" in the title of the program. In this sense, the logic of community members might clash or be in opposition with the logic of university scholarship. While I was comfortable in the Journal Club format that felt to me like a graduate seminar, others might feel intimidated or suffer from "imposter syndrome." As a community-based program that strives to be inclusive, the CSP also needs to make a space for people who may have not had positive educational experiences. A couple of Community Scholars pointed out that there is a need for adult education that bridges the gap for people who do not have the formal educational credentials, for example, to enter into post-secondary studies. One Scholar said, "There's this amazing opportunity to say, 'Here's all these people that have been doing work in their communities now, and could be getting back into it, and could be re-entering academia,' and there's a natural gift there or connection" for the CSP to fill that need (Interview 2).

Considering that most of the Community Scholars fall into an older demographic, there is a higher probability of Community Scholars being in a more mature stage of their careers, with potentially more responsibility and more participation in management, programming, or fundraising. This demographic may also be more interested in professional development or advancing their careers and be open to more education.

**Recommendations:** The CSP has an opportunity to contribute to the professional development of their Scholars in a more formalized and purposeful way. Opportunities were especially evident for two main areas: 1) for adult education and training focused on research literacy; and 2) for bringing together communities of practice to share knowledge and ideas (more on this below).

Formalizing these opportunities could be done in the form of a general “research certificate,” with a complete curriculum and potentially through the continuing education programs at each partner university. Such an initiative would tap into the way in which participants described their organization’s approaches to professional development and into the specific knowledge gaps identified by participants. Doing so would open up a new avenue for funding and would create new linkages between the university and public.

Community Scholars could be asked whether they would be interested in a formal certificate program in a subsequent survey. A focus group or other form of consultation with Community Scholars should also be undertaken to understand what else might be useful for those working in the not-for-profit sector.

There are many ways to further promote the pride that many Community Scholars reported feeling about using the portal, and on counterbalance the uncertainty that some might feel about their abilities or qualifications. Creating a culture of community scholarship requires a concerted effort that needs to be communicated to potential program participants from the moment they encounter the program. For example, the website needs to communicate this on the home page (rather than a history of the program) through an inclusive “Welcome” page that defines community scholarship and personalizes the program with spotlights on actual scholars.

### *3. Fostering communities of practice*

The CSP has the ability to bring together like-minded individuals working in the same fields through the journal club meetings and workshops offered in person or online. Conversations during the research interviews addressed whether Community Scholars would be interested in participating in “communities of practice” facilitated by the program. The journal club meetings are one way that the CSP is already working in this area. Community Scholars participating in the journal club meetings also indicated that learning from others in their fields was the most helpful feature of the journal club meetings. A couple of interview

participants showed an interest in hosting a workshop in their area of expertise for Community Scholars. One person said:

I'd love it if there's anything I can do to help because I don't think I probably would be where [I am] right now if someone didn't stop me on the street [and say], "Hey, you should sign up for this weird thing where we're gonna read journals" (Interview 2).

Other feedback from Scholars about the journal clubs were that although they found the topic really interesting, it was not pertinent to their work specifically. One person commented that they would forward information to a person in their organization that could benefit from the workshop even if they could not.

**Recommendations:** The CSP should continue to offer to host targeted journal club meetings for these groups or offer to recruit participants for Community Scholars wanting to host their own meeting or start their own less formal discussion groups.

The CSP could act as a catalyst for the formation of communities of practice by using its database of participants to identify Community Scholars doing similar kinds of work. Recruiting journal club participants might prove more successful if the CSP sends a targeted invite to Scholars working in a particular area, in addition to sending a general message to the whole group of Scholars in the CSP newsletter. The CSP may require permission from Community Scholars to share contact information in this way amongst the program participants. This could be facilitated by having Community Scholars sign a release form allowing (or not allowing) the sharing of their contact information with other Community Scholars for the purpose of building community.

While the CSP librarians have most often selected the articles to read in the journal club meetings, encouraging participants, in a targeted and personalized way, to use their expertise and interests to choose articles for the journal club meetings might also encourage more participation. In addition, a personal request for participation in a program is often the most successful strategy for recruiting participants or volunteers.

#### *4. Acknowledging and encouraging the continued support of publishers*

The willingness of academic publishers to share their journals with non-profits in British Columbia has made the Community Scholars Program possible. This is an unprecedented relationship that began with Simon Fraser University, and has now been extended to UNBC, Thompson Rivers University, Vancouver Island University and the University of British Columbia. The question is whether this relationship could be extended to other universities, provinces or countries. There are a number of ways to encourage publishers to share

research with non-profits in other jurisdictions and provide incentives and feedback that would also benefit the participating publishers.

The numerous stories of research impact would be of interest to all who support the Community Scholars Program, especially publishers, who use various forms of media to communicate to their stakeholders, including shareholders, universities, and contributing scholars.

Informal conversations with a tax accountant and a non-profit accounting specialist at a Canadian accounting and consulting firm indicated that it is highly likely that publishers, even if they are not based in Canada, could receive a taxable donation receipt for donating research access to the Community Scholars program.

**Recommendations:** The CSP can provide case studies and instances of impact for publishers to include in annual reports, blogs, and impact reports. This feedback would provide evidence for participating publishers' good corporate citizenship. While anecdotes about research impact have been sent to publishers when requested or on an ad hoc basis, it could easily be made into an annual deliverable for the publishers. In addition, this would provide the motivation for the CSP to gather these stories through an annual, mandatory survey of scholars [see: Communication with Community Scholars].

While this research project did not include a formal website evaluation, the integral role of publishers should be emphasized on the CSP website. Publishers should be acknowledged as partners and also as funders. They should also be mentioned on the home page of the CSP website in the text of the project description, as well as at the bottom of the page where the partners are acknowledged.

Publishers and the CSP should work with a tax consultant to ensure that charitable donation recognition is handled properly. As funders of the CSP and this research evaluation, the United Way or McConnell Foundation might also participate in these discussions, as they already act as a 'clearinghouse' for charities and non-profits across the province.

Community Scholars are informed when they sign up for the program that they are not allowed to share their log-in with others. Scholars should also be given clear information around intellectual property, what kind of knowledge sharing is permissible, citation requirements and plagiarism. Recently the CSP librarians offered a workshop on this topic. This could be part of a mandatory new Scholar "workshop" that is required for new recruits and a smaller intellectual property module for existing participants. Community Scholars are also reminded in the welcome email sent to all new scholars, on the website, and in "intro to the portal" workshops. Communicating to publishers that Community Scholars have had this kind of instruction, may provide a level of confidence for publishers to continue supporting the program.

## 5. Essential role of librarians

Responses to questions in the survey, stories from the research interviews, and conversations with the librarians confirm that the program could not have achieved any level of success without the administrative, intellectual, and customer relationship management provided by the CSP librarians. Virtually all interviewees have received valuable assistance from the CSP librarians and are thankful and vocal about having them as a resource. Given that some Community Scholars are located in remote geographical locations, the CSP librarian becomes the human face behind an online research portal. The model of having several local librarians distributed throughout the province appears to have been successful in ensuring that support is available for Community Scholars outside of the Lower Mainland, and not just those close to a university library.

The CSP librarians are unique in their abilities to fulfill the dual role of a scholarly and public librarian. Although they are housed within university libraries that require them to be fluent in research skills, they must also be in a position to facilitate use of the portal and other kinds of research engagement for members of the public. Discussions with the librarians demonstrate their innovative approaches to recruiting, training and educating Community Scholars, including using local libraries to host information sessions, offering curated training sessions for organizations, and enlisting colleagues to present workshops on research-related topics.

Comments from Community Scholars about the navigability of the portal were varied and indicate that many scholars are having minor problems finding what they need, while a few are having trouble even getting started. As troubleshooting is an important role for the CSP librarians, the difficulty of knowing how to support a range of users, with different kinds of problems is a challenge. This is both a communication issue and a technical issue that was not addressed specifically by the survey. Although we asked whether Community Scholars were having problems, we did not ask what kind of fix might help them: more education, one-on-one troubleshooting, or changing the portal itself.

Keeping up-to-date records about CSP participants has been one of the key responsibilities of the SFU librarian. Heather de Forest, who has been with the CSP since its inception, described how she came to learn more about the non-profit and community services sector over the course of the program. One realization was that this employment sector has a high amount of employee turnover or mobility. This translates to high turnover for CSP membership as well and throws into evidence the duplication of participant records in three different places: the SFU library requires information for logging into the portal; the CSP librarians require information to send emails using the Mailchimp marketing platform; and an Excel spreadsheet is used to track details about the needs of the Scholars as a type of customer relationship management (CRM).

On top of these roles, the CSP librarians also act as educators and the primary purveyors of the professional development role of the program described above. That is, they play an

instrumental role in the transformation of members of the community into “Community Scholars.”

**Recommendations:** The amount of time allocated to the CSP librarians, particularly the lead librarian at SFU, has increased as the program has grown. If the program is scaled up to include other provinces, having a team of librarians across the province working together, rather than one single librarian dedicated full-time to the program has proven a successful model. The roles and responsibilities of each CSP librarian, however, should be clearly documented so that both the CSP librarian and their managers are aware of the tasks and time allocated to the CSP.<sup>3</sup>

If the program is expected to grow, a “lead” librarian should be designated. Through conversations with the CSP librarians, there was the sense that there is no “hierarchy” within their team; however, clearly the SFU librarian is far more active and engaged in the program and more would be demanded of this person if the program were scaled to other provinces and locations.

At the same time, efforts should be made to distribute the work of the program evenly. Responsibilities could be delineated geographically to improve service and relieve the burden on the SFU librarian, as presently the SFU librarian manages Scholars from the Okanagan region, as well as all of the participants in the lower mainland.

One suggestion from the librarian at UNBC, Kealin McCabe, was to capitalize on the strengths of the librarians to the benefit of the program. For example, Kealin has experience teaching undergraduate students about research literacy. This expertise could be used to deliver similar workshops to Community Scholars.

To alleviate the work of the librarians, especially if the program scales, the problem of record keeping needs further study and attention. A proper CRM—one that allows contacting participants or that can be synchronized with a tool like Mailchimp—may be a more efficient solution to managing participants. CSP librarians, Heather and Kate, have already identified this approach, and it is recommended that this, or another solution, be implemented before the program is scaled up.

Although low numbers of survey respondents reported having difficulties with logging in, navigation, and searching the database, user experience testing would be required to understand further the specific issues that Community Scholars might be having. This might only be worthwhile if the CSP had the funding or ability to change the portal’s user interface.

A possible fix for Community Scholars who are having problems navigating the portal might be the inclusion of a button, visible on all pages, that would allow Community Scholars to “contact a CSP librarian.” This button could link to a customer service form where they could

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<sup>3</sup> I understand some of this “job description” work is currently being done by Kate Shuttleworth.

detail the issues they are having. While the CSP librarians have always been available, this feature would create awareness and simplify the process for contacting them. This could also allow librarians to understand first-hand the nature of these problems, and to fix them more directly, at the time when the Community Scholar is needing the help.

## *6. CSP as a bridge for knowledge and feedback*

The CSP is in a unique position to act as a liaison between the academic research community and publics who could benefit from access to research. Indeed, the program has the potential to encourage the flow of knowledge between the “many worlds” of professional scholars, community scholars, frontline service deliverers, community and non-profit management, policy (government), and clients/citizens. The flow of knowledge, however, between the scholarly world in the form of published research, and Community Scholars in the community and non-profit world, has so far been enabled only in one direction. Some Community Scholars have pointed out that this could perpetuate an attitude of privilege, based on Western epistemology, that does not take into account the important kinds of knowledge being created outside of the university, both formally through research methods and informally through experiential and tacit ways of gaining understanding. The potential exists to create an alternative system that allows for the inclusion of different kinds of knowledge and encourages feedback from Community Scholars back to University Scholars.

Some of the research interviews addressed this issue of “epistemological justice” with suggestions as to how to create feedback mechanisms for the CSP. For example, during the discussion with journal club participants, we talked about the value of having researchers as guest speakers or participants in the journal club meetings. In a couple of the interviews, Community Scholars expressed interest in working with graduate students, perhaps as part of a co-op program that could assist research initiatives while allowing students to gain on-the-job experience.

Some Community Scholars intimated they would be interested in a “research hub” where Community Scholars could be linked up with graduate students, postdocs, or researchers to take on a research need within their organization. Such an idea has the support of the CSP librarians. Heather suggested modelling a pilot program along the lines of the Guelph Lab at Guelph University, or the [Science/Research Shop collaboratives](#) that have been successful in Europe. Kate shared that she has heard from the United Way that “what most of our non-profits really want is a researcher. Access is great, portal is great but we need someone to do the work. And that’s the primary thing that would help them.”

Community Scholars also mobilize knowledge for their volunteer community and clients, interpreting academic knowledge for front-line workers. One woman who works with seniors and regularly attends the “Supporting Seniors Journal Club” said that she would share research findings from the journal club meeting “when we do our trainings with our seniors.

To share that knowledge with them” (Interview 3). Journal club participants spoke about the benefits of also having the seniors themselves providing feedback on research findings.

The CSP also has an opportunity to improve policymaking when its members have better sources of information from which to draw. In my conversation with Graham, he pointed out that:

Non-profits are invited to tables to talk about policy change and engage with things, but they're at a disadvantage to government and business who can either pay to have access or have commissioned the research and so [...] the non-profit is sort of walking into situations where they can't play an equal role (Interview 5).

The CSP could consult with Scholars who may have been involved in policy discussions to discuss ways to enable expertise or advocacy in this area.

The CSP acts as a bridge between the scholarly publishing world (based on a for-profit model) and a public good model for access to knowledge. One Community Scholar mentioned in the comments to the survey that they hoped the CSP librarians might advocate for more open access publications suggesting they “work with governments and university to shift tax-payer funder research publication to open access journals for the betterment of Canadians and humanity.” The existence of the CSP is already a win for the public good, however, being dependent on publishers for the program creates a conflict if the program were to advocate openly for open access.

Finally, universities are looking for ways to promote better relationships with their communities and increase their research impact. Ensuring that avenues for two-way communication are in place is an important step in improving understanding between academic researchers, their professional counterparts, and the greater public.

**Recommendations:** The CSP should consider creating an advisory board that draws from all stakeholder groups, including Community Scholars, representatives from the VP Research office at SFU and partner universities, scholars with expertise in community service and non-profits, university researchers from fields of interest (e.g., social work, psychology, geography, law, communication, environmental studies etc.), graduate students; and the CSP leadership.

In addition, the CSP could strengthen their existing relationship with the Community Engaged Research Initiative (CERI) by creating a research hub for Community Scholars and university scholars to share expertise and collaborate on projects. This kind of initiative would move the CSP towards the kind of “two-way knowledge exchange” envisioned by Gwen and by several of the scholars interviewed. This initiative would naturally require funding and administrative support, but the timing seems right for such a request, given SFU’s increasing interest in promoting outreach, community-based research, and research impact.

Another kind of “hub” could also be created around non-profit funding. One interview participant talked about the need for a “grant writing 101” course, or a place where non-profits can access information about securing funding. Universities have fairly recently caught on to the need for academic staff to have training and support for grant writing and have expertise to share. Large funders, like the United Way, could also be involved in such an initiative, to understand better the expectations for impacts reporting and evidenced based programming from the funders’ perspective.

Lastly, given the need participating organizations have for researchers themselves, the CSP could better serve participating organizations by connecting Community Scholars with researchers/graduate students. Such an initiative could be supported by the MITACS organization, where community organizations “advertise” their needs through MITACS, and students are able to access a funding structure to support their co-op position. Similarly, it could be supported by SSHRC Partnership grants. Although more onerous to secure, they would provide full funding for a graduate student and help build stronger partnerships between SFU and the community organization.

## *7. The value of access*

The CSP enables access and provides many connections. The CSP portal allows access to scholarly research content. The program also connects Community Scholars to each other. It provides access to university libraries for those outside of major centres, overcoming geographical barriers; it bridges the socio-cultural differences between the academic community and the public; and it eases access to financial support for Community Scholars who are able to showcase their research expertise in grant applications. Taken together, access and connections are key for the program to succeed in the daunting task of making “scholarship” possible outside of a university.

At the heart of these connections is the value that Community Scholars found in access to research. Not only is the program successful in connecting Community Scholars with the information they need (83% of survey respondents reported finding the information that they needed in their most recent search), participants are also extremely grateful for the access they have received. Unprompted, both survey respondents and interviewees expressed thankfulness for the resource in the open-ended comments to the survey, perhaps out of concern the program would no longer be available to them. As one person said:

I'm hoping we're not having to do these interviews to justify its existence, because of, you know, it's coming to the end of its term, or anything like that, because it is so useful and we use it all the time.

In what can be seen as a testament to the value of the program, a few Community Scholars admitted that they had retired or changed jobs but were still retaining their access. This value

is also reflected in the wait list that is sometimes been in place, to join the Community Scholars Program.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that people are not able to access research without the portal, but participants revealed that while they were resourceful in finding the research they needed, it is frustrating to access research through precarious and inconsistent means, such as asking colleagues with a university log in, hiring university students with database access, or emailing researchers directly for copies of articles.

Despite the high use value that Community Scholars derive from the program, it would be a challenge for participating organizations to pay for this access. Community Scholars value access, but given the financial constraints of their organizations, it simply cannot be prioritized. Of those surveyed, only one person had paid for an article, and only 3 people worked at organizations that paid for database subscriptions.

**Recommendations:** It is clear that providing access to research is a cornerstone of the program and that Community Scholars attach high use value to the portal. However, the relationship between this value and organization's willingness or ability to pay remains unclear. This unusual economic reality, where high demand does not lead to a willingness to purchase, should be further explored, potentially through a survey to participants.

It is also important to convey both aspects of this reality to funders of community and non-profit organizations, as well as to the funders of the CSP. Organizations have an interest and willingness to incorporate research into their practices, but it is currently financially prohibitive for groups to be well informed about research and be expected to demonstrate their knowledge in funding applications.

## 8. Level of engagement

The CSP is very active in encouraging use of the portal and other forms of participation in the program. From offering one-on-one troubleshooting, to orientation workshops, to webinars, the librarians facilitate use in many different ways. Survey responses confirm that Community Scholars experience barriers that, more often than not, cannot be mitigated by the CSP. Rather, barriers that exist are a feature of the non-profit world. Nevertheless, some questions remain. For example, it remains unclear why a few Community Scholars do not make use of the database despite having had access for up to a year.

The survey and interviews reveal four distinct levels of engagement with the portal. There is a core group of active users who derive a lot of benefit from the portal; a second group that uses the portal periodically, depending on programming or funding needs; a third group who use it infrequently, but still derive benefit; and a fourth group who underutilizes the resource or does not use it at all.

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<sup>4</sup> Currently, there is no waitlist for the CSP due to a recent initiative to follow up on derelict emails for Community Scholars in the program.

This developmental evaluation mostly addressed the perspective of active users who have used the portal enough to comment on their experience. The demographics, challenges, and use patterns of the Scholars will help to provide further insights into their needs and expectations as the CSP continues to evaluate its future direction. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that because the survey only captured the views of 26% of participants, there is still some uncertainty around whether this is a representative sampling of all Community Scholars. It is possible that mostly the very engaged users answered the survey. For example, assumptions about the education level of the Community Scholars (over 60% have a graduate degree) could influence the CSP to not offer as much in the way of research training.

**Recommendations:** Despite the overall glowing endorsements from Community Scholars for the work that the CSP librarians are doing, there are a few Scholars who might make more use of the portal if they had additional support and encouragement.

One way to reach such scholars may be through a mandatory annual survey to identify people who need assistance in one or more areas. This may prove to be a less intimidating way for Scholars to recognize and admit that they need help.

Another option would be to offer (perhaps annually) a troubleshooting session for Scholars that offers individualized support for those who need it. This could take the form of a librarian online “office hour” or be coordinated as a sign-up feature where one-on-one video-conferencing sessions with librarians are available over the course of a couple of weeks.

A third way to help Scholars use the portal might be to hold a mandatory orientation session that serves to onboard new members ahead of granting them their login credentials. CSP librarians might also suggest for new members to defer this onboarding until they actually have a need to use the portal for research, provided there is not waiting list for participation.

In addition, because of the episodic nature of use, many Community Scholars may need to “relearn” the steps for logging on and using the portal. Having the video tutorial on the log in page might be suitable for such a refresher and would be available just-in-time and without requiring Scholars to admit they need help.

Finally, it is recommended that CSP librarians follow up with new recruits in their geographic areas after a few months of signing up, to troubleshoot any issues.

## *9. Financial resources for CSP*

Although this developmental evaluation did not include a targeted analysis of the funding and administrative support for the program, a few insights based on the consultation with users

and discussions with program leaders indicate this is an area that urgently requires further investigation. The CSP is well positioned to pursue new sources of funding for various aspects of the program. The adult education component of the program may create opportunities for funding, particularly if expanded. The CSP would also qualify for funding programs aimed at improving knowledge mobilization and research outreach to the public, especially in terms of ability for the CSP to link scholars in remote areas like First Nations reserves and Northern BC locations.

**Recommendations:** For the next phase of the theory of change and logic model evaluation, the CSP should undertake a review of resources (Innovation Network, 2005).

The CSP should be eligible to apply for a number of different SSHRC grants and awards. Previously, the program has been a part of other SSHRC funded projects, but the success of the program warrants dedicated funding for new initiatives and ongoing programming:

- [SSHRC Connection Grant](#)
- [SSHRC Impact Award](#)

Further work should also be done around what sort of ongoing and one-time funding could be obtained from various levels of government or private donors.

## 10. *Communication with stakeholders*

The CSP has quickly grown into an organization that extends far beyond the boundaries of the university library. The success of the program, and interest from many jurisdictions regarding its operation, warrants putting resources towards better internal and external communication such as improving the website, using social media, and optimizing communication with participants. This developmental analysis did not include a communication analysis, so limited observations about communication aspects of the program is supported by the data obtained from Community Scholars. For example, specific questions around communication were not asked in the survey, and there were very sparse comments about the website or newsletters in any of the survey responses. One interview participant said that she would like more targeted messaging regarding the newsletter:

If the subject line says 'Community Scholars newsletter' versus the subject where, 'Learn about programming for senior immigrants,' well that, I definitely would have been like, 'Oh. Yeah.' (Interview 10).

Another interviewee admitted that she didn't even know there was a website!

Some survey participants offered suggestions for the CSP that are already happening, such as a refresher training course or online training videos. A number of survey respondents

indicated that they could not find the article they were seeking or that it was paywalled. These are indications that not all Scholars have been proactive in reading newsletters or have taken advantage of what the CSP has to offer through the website. The CSP has offered workshops on finding research beyond the portal and offers research support for finding other ways to access research that's not in the portal—for example, using Open Access Button or Unpaywall, asking the public library (members of the public can sometimes get academic materials through interlibrary loan), and asking an author to send a PDF of an article (which has been successful for some scholars).<sup>5</sup>

**Recommendations:** The next phase of evaluation for the CSP should include a communication assessment and plan.

Some questions that the CSP could ask in subsequent consultations with Community Scholars:

- Newsletter format and whether Scholars are reading it
- Preferred methods to stay up to date
- Whether Scholars would like to opt in or out of some features
- Website navigation and friendliness

The CSP could benefit from a web-site redesign/rebranding if funding is available. Could the CSP website be housed outside of the SFU architecture to provide more flexibility in the graphic design and formatting? Suggestions for this website would be to use a more visual and dynamic design with “impacts” reporting on the website to communicate the successes of the program, similar to the [United Way website](#).

The CSP should also look into how and where they are being profiled or discussed. For example, there is no link from the [SFU main library site](#) to the CSP.

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<sup>5</sup> This is from a note from Kate Shuttleworth confirming that Community Scholars have options if they cannot find an online source.

### **III. Research Methodology**

#### *1. Objectives of the evaluation*

The overall objective of the research was to evaluate the Community Scholars Program, based on feedback from the CSP community, so as to promote program sustainability, growth, and further development. Several research activities were proposed to achieve this goal:

- Meet with CSP librarians and Dean of Libraries at SFU about their challenges and vision for the project;
- Survey program participants regarding their use of the CSP portal, participation in activities, and research impacts;
- Interview Community Scholars about their experience being a part of the program;
- Share research findings with CSP librarians and community; and
- Create alternative media formats of the research results for broader dissemination.

This project adopted a “developmental evaluation” approach, pioneered by Michael Quinn Patton (2008), a form of evaluation that takes into account the unique needs of organizations working in fields that are emergent or complex. Developmental evaluation relies on established methods of data gathering and analysis, but differs from traditional forms of evaluation in the following ways:

- The focus of the evaluation is on learning rather than compliance or accountability;
- The purpose is to provide feedback to support and guide further development;
- The evaluator is viewed as a team member in the initiative rather than an impartial assessor;
- This role goes beyond the data collection and analysis phase of the evaluation, with expectations for the evaluator to inform decision making and further knowledge mobilization and learning within and outside the organization.

The evaluation addresses system-level dynamics, innovation and strategy, frames and explains findings, and focuses on building relationships (Dozois, Langlois & Blanchet-Cohen, 2010). A full development evaluation was not possible within the short-term and limited resources of this post-doctoral research project; however, considerable data was gathered from the consultations with Community Scholars that will direct the CSP in its next phase of development.

#### *2. CSP survey*

The researchers sent a survey out to all participants in the Community Scholars Program at the beginning of January 2020. The research team drafted the survey with input and

guidance from the CSP librarians, and the survey instrument was pretested in advance. The purpose of the survey was to obtain baseline understanding of how community scholars were using the database and to connect with participants about their experiences. In total, the survey was sent to 419 active email addresses<sup>6</sup>, and 109 surveys were completed, with a response rate of 26%. The survey took an average of 21 minutes to complete and was comprised of 28 questions, 6 of which were demographic questions and 4 of which were administrative.<sup>7</sup> As a thank-you for participating in the survey, participants were given the option of sharing their contact information to be entered into a draw for a \$100 gift certificate, which was awarded to one lucky Community Scholar.

### 3. CSP interviews

This evaluation project also gathered feedback from 19 Community Scholars through semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited via a question on the survey indicating whether they were interested in doing a one-on-one interview and through a follow-up email to those who indicated “yes.” As the interview research process was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, a second email was sent to all Community Scholars asking for participation in a video-conference interview. The remaining interview spots were filled within 48 hours. Each interview participant was offered a \$25 gift card for taking the time to participate in these one-hour interviews.

The audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed, summarized using a process of memoing (Groenewald, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 2014), and were analyzed using qualitative (grounded theory) analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The interview data was coded using open-ended coding with constant comparison (Strauss and Corbin, 2014; Given, 2008; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Five research memos and the full transcription of the interview were sent back to selected interview participants for their review and feedback. This process of “member checking” helps to ensure that participants are included in the evaluation process and ensures that themes and summaries of the conversations have been captured accurately (Maxwell, 1992).

Finally, during the analysis and report writing phase of the project, the CSP librarians, Heather and Kate, and the SFU Dean of Libraries, Gwen, were given the opportunity to comment and ask questions about the report under development.

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<sup>6</sup> It is unknown if all email addresses were being monitored.

<sup>7</sup> Question one was to obtain consent to participate in the research project required before participants could proceed on to the survey questions, while the last three questions asked about further interest and participation in the project.

## V. Research Results

Six major themes emerged from the data gathered during the surveys and interviews. These themes summarize the responses to the survey and experiences that Community Scholars shared through their involvement in the developmental evaluation:

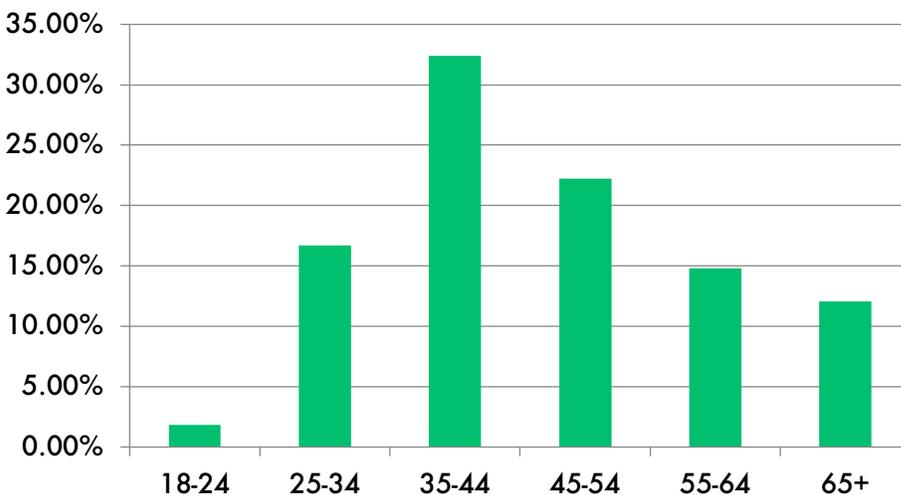
1. Who are the Community Scholars?
2. Use of the portal and Community Scholars Program activities
3. Access to research, program impact, and research impact
4. Challenges for Community Scholars
5. The CSP librarians
6. Suggestions, improvements, and critical feedback

### 1. Who are the Community Scholars?

A number of questions in the survey asked basic demographic questions, to understand the group in general. CSP librarians do gather some personal information about new CSP recruits through participant intake forms, but the program wanted more in-depth understanding of their Scholars. The demographic data from the survey was also cross tabulated with other questions to see if there were any significant correlations between demographics and survey responses.

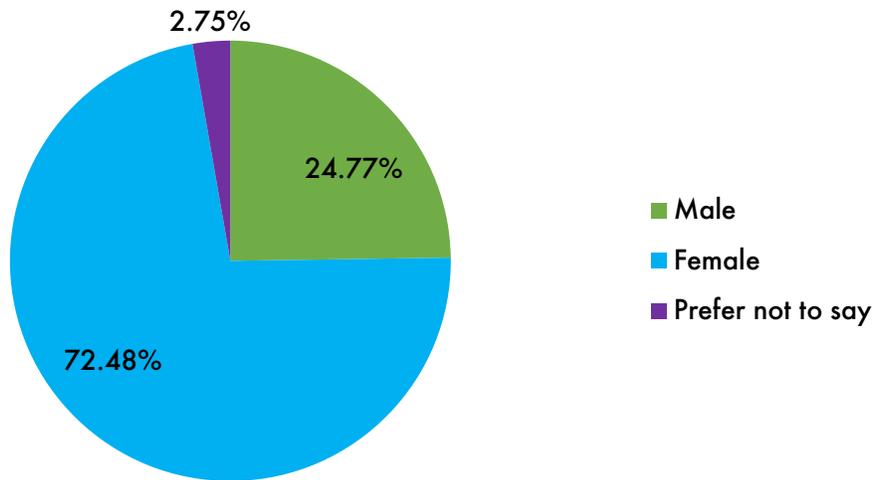
The demographic make-up of participants in the survey and interviews varies significantly by age, gender, geographical location, and profession. The majority of Scholars are in the 35 – 44 and 45 – 54 age categories, with more people older than 65 participating in the program than in the 18 – 24 age category.

Figure 1 Q16 What is your age (n=108)

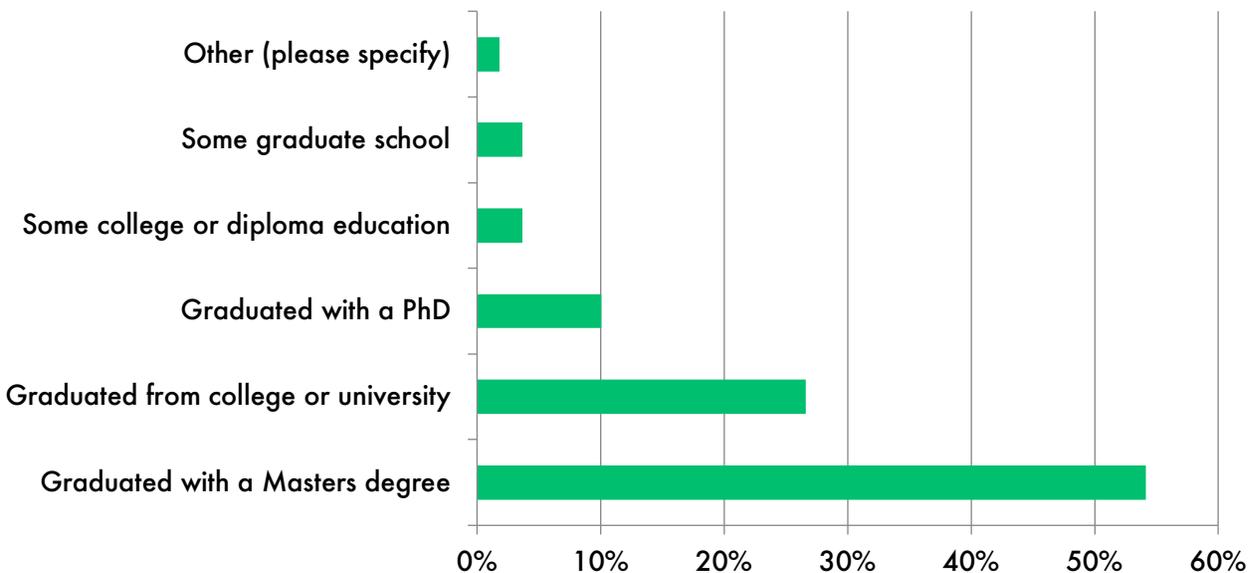


The gender split for scholars is also more than 70% (79) female and almost one quarter (27) male, with slight differences in how each group answered some of the survey questions. For example, **Question 9** asked 'Estimate how often you search for information in the portal' with 15% of men using it once a week compared with only 2.5% of women. The majority of women use it a few times a year (54% of women), while just under 44% of men do.

**Figure 2 Q17 How would you describe your gender (n=108)**



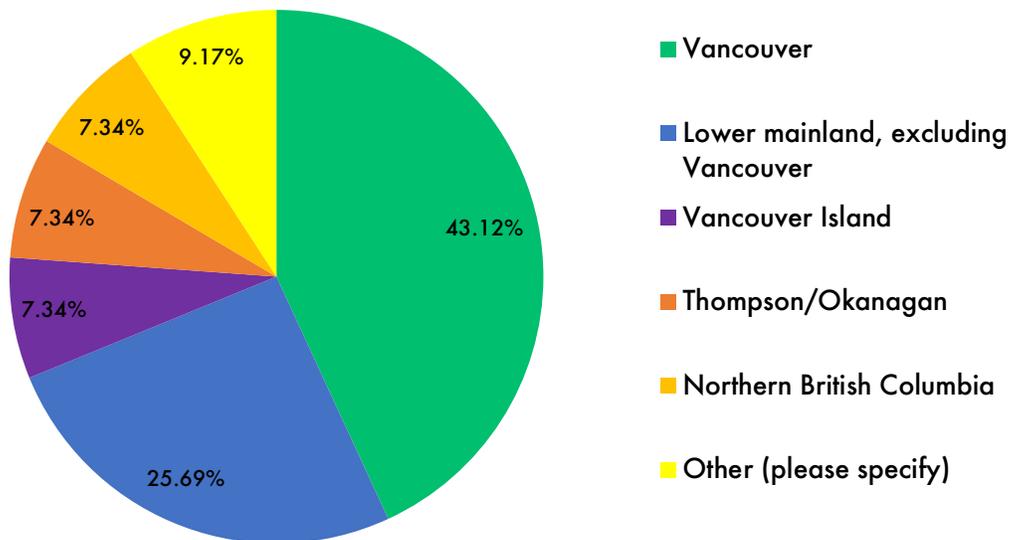
**Figure 3 Q18 What is the highest level of education you have completed (n=109)**



The vast majority of Community Scholars have some kind of postsecondary degree, with more than 50% having a master’s degree, and 10% having a PhD. This indicates that over 60% of participants have graduate-level research experience. There was no significant difference in education level between men and women.

Community Scholars are also located in many different areas of the province. The different locations correspond to universities that are involved with the program with Simon Fraser University covering Vancouver and the Lower Mainland; Thompson River University responsible for the Thompson/Okanagan location; University of Northern British Columbia covering northern BC; and Vancouver Island University working with Community Scholars from Vancouver Island. Respondents who chose the “other” category live and work on the Sunshine Coast, Rural Vancouver Island, the South Cariboo, the Kootenays, or “province wide.”

**Figure 4** Q19 Where is your place of work located in the province (n=109)



Community Scholars also work in many different roles ranging from an executive director of a non-profit organization, to a physician working in public health, to arts administrators, counsellors, and nurse educators (Question 20).

Question 21 asked respondents in what fields of research they are interested. This question also demonstrates the diversity of topics for which Community Scholars need access to research, including drug policy, marine protected areas, and disability rights. The following



motivation or purpose or meaning, it means they need to reflect on those experiences. They need to have more diverse experiences rather than the constant stream of staples, like swimming and bowling. They need to have a much more diverse stream. And they need to also be able to reflect on it, and reflection is not built in anywhere in the disability sector (Interview 6).

Another Community Scholar, the director of a legal advocacy group, was passionate about her work, and related that they “were very excited” to get access to research through the CSP. Having access to the CSP database enabled her organization to act as intervenor in a case of discrimination against a transgender political candidate that was heard by the BC Human Rights Tribunal. This Community Scholar was able to create a “Brandeis Brief”, which allows for scientific and social science information to be submitted as evidence in a case (Epstein, 1999). She pointed out that:

[In] this situation for us, [access to the CSP portal] was extremely helpful, because it allowed us to really craft our legal arguments, and the submissions we wanted to make, within this social, cultural, health care context that's very important to understanding what constitutes discrimination against a trans person (Interview 7).

She was enthusiastic about participating in a journal club and would potentially like to suggest topics for a journal club around human rights issues, because her organization frequently organizes internal and public discussions on important issues.

The interview process provided a more in-depth look into the many kinds of diverse and important community services provided by Community Scholars. For example, one interview participant works to improve housing for people with disabilities, another trains volunteers on how to provide palliative care, and a third conducts research to support youth in British Columbia. Much of the discussions centered around how Community Scholars are engaged with research in the context of the larger challenges of their careers. Every Community Scholar that was interviewed is working to solve difficult social problems.

## *2. Use of the portal and Community Scholars Program activities*

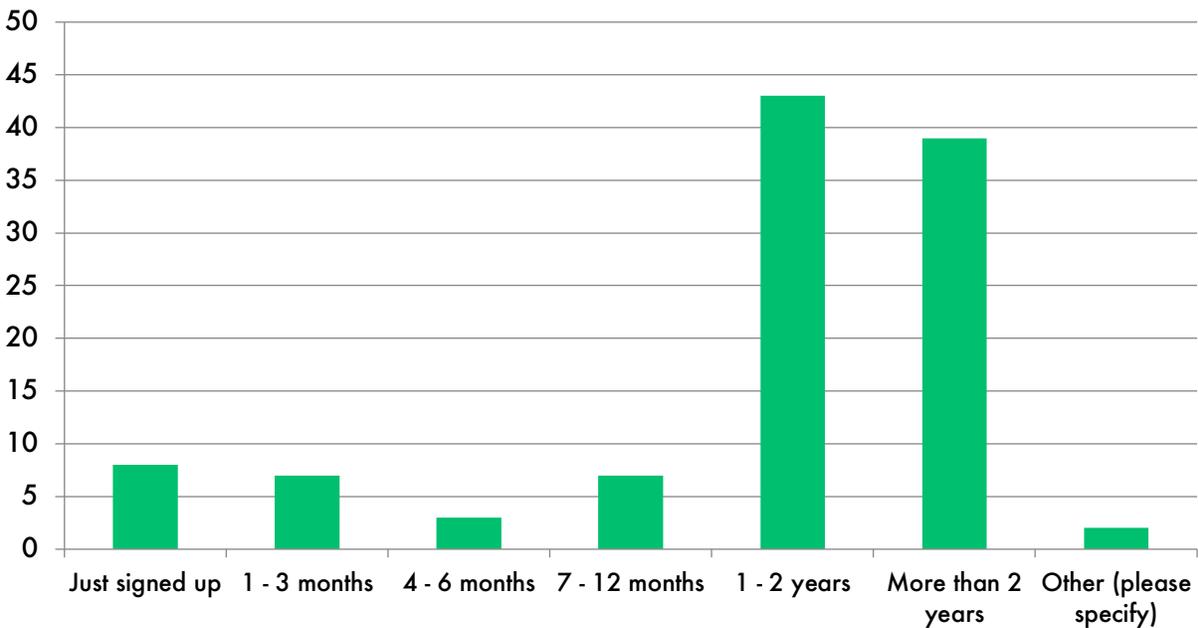
While the main feature of the Community Scholars Program is the portal that allows access to more than 20,000 journals, e-books, and references materials, the CSP also offers other ways to enhance community participation, improve research skills, and support adult learning in general. The [CSP website provides links](#) to the various options for orientation and training, finding academic resources, using specialized resources, and participating in a journal club. Since March of 2020, the CSP also offers a variety of online workshops, that all participants can attend regardless of location. In addition, CSP librarians also provide curated workshops for individual organizations by request.

During the initial set-up of the CSP, the organizers were uncertain whether simple access to the portal would be enough to support the Community Scholars. Graham Dover expressed the concern that “if you have access to the material, [that] doesn’t mean you could necessarily interpret it and engage with it” (Interview 5). However, feedback from many of the participants in the surveys and interviews indicate that Community Scholars have been highly successful at navigating the challenges posed by the technology, the content, and their own personal circumstances.

The survey gathered information about usage from Community Scholars to understand frequency of use, barriers or challenges to use, and participation in Community Scholars educational or community-building opportunities.

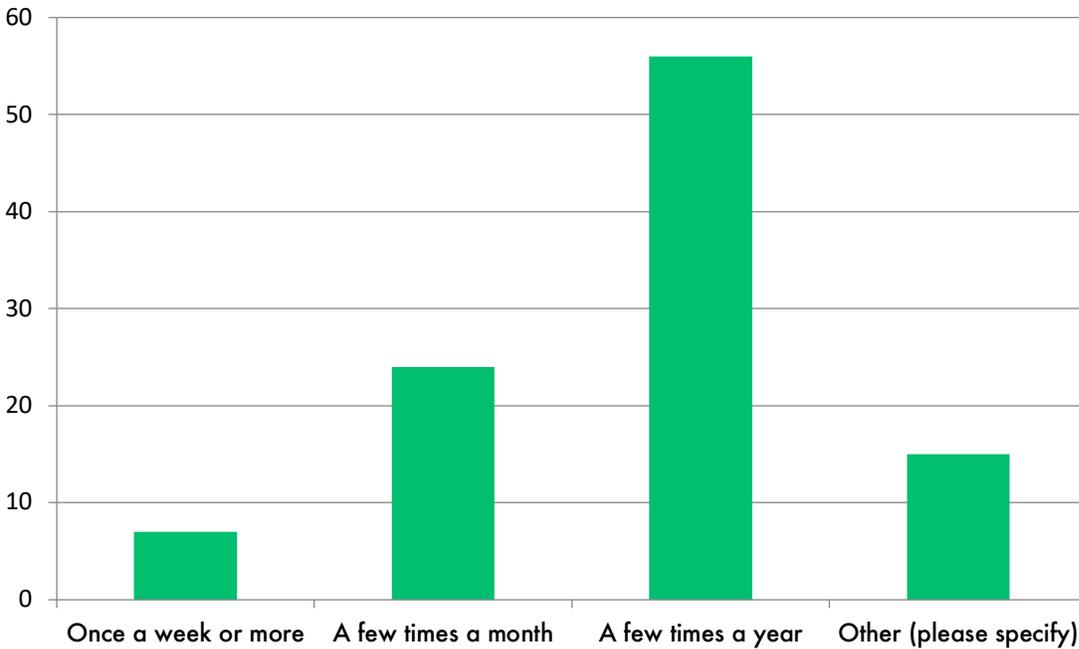
The first question in the survey<sup>9</sup> asked participants how long they had participated in the program. The largest number of respondents (43) had been involved for 1-2 years, with 39 people involved for more than two years.

**Figure 6 Q1 Please indicate how long you have been involved in the Community Scholars Program (n=109)**



<sup>9</sup> In the survey this is actually the second question, as the first question asked for consent to participate.

**Figure 7 Q8 Estimate how often you search for information in the portal (n=92)**



**Question 8** asked respondents how often they use the portal. The majority of respondents use the Community Scholars portal a few times a year (56/92) with many commenting that their need for the resource is episodic depending on their projects or work cycle:

We go through heavier research periods and then not as much, so during those heavy times I use it every day.

Several people indicated they use the portal a few times a month (24). A few Community Scholars (7) use it once a week or more, with one person commenting that:

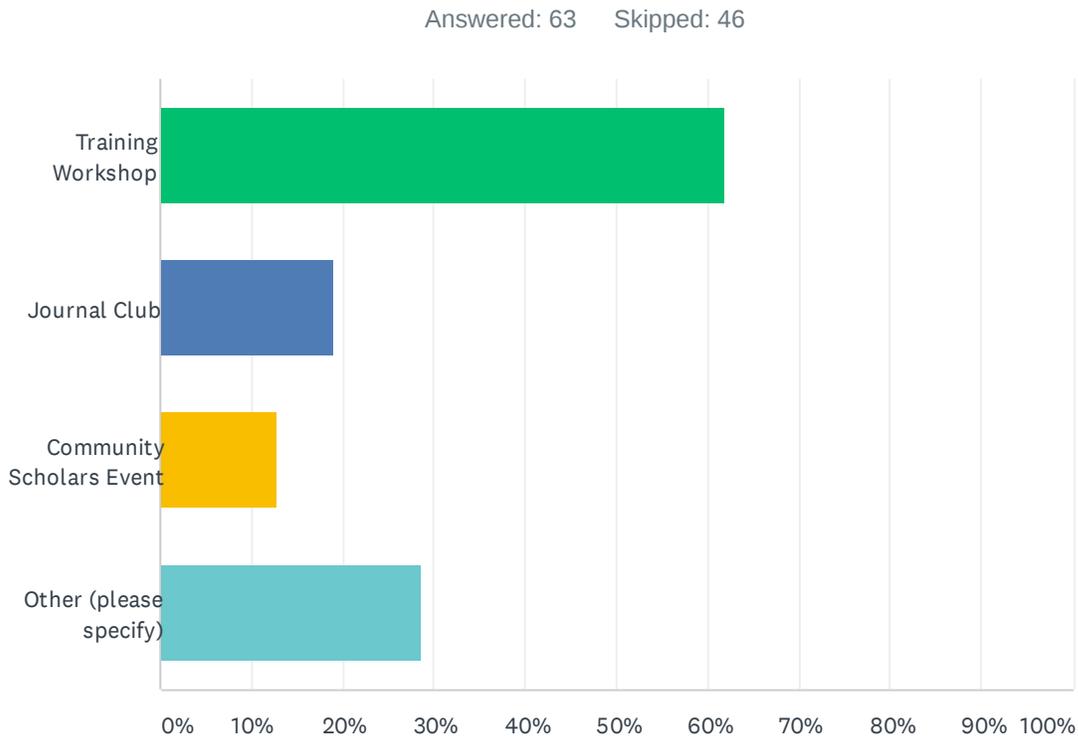
We are a start-up non-profit (pending charitable registration) and have been in existence for less than one year. We are a research organization and as we become better established anticipate we will be using it daily.

The remainder (3) use it once a year or less, each providing a justification why their usage has been minimal: one person has retired, one just got access, and another has not had the opportunity to use it yet.

**Question 13** of the survey also asked Community Scholars whether they had participated in other CSP offerings beyond the portal, such as attending workshops or journal club activities. Of the 63 people who answered the question, 39 (62%) people had participated in a

training workshop, 12 (19%) had participated in a journal club meeting, and 8 (13%) had attended other CSP events.

**Figure 8 Q13 Have you participated in other Community Scholars activities? (May choose more than one)**



Some people left comments such as:

- I don't have the energy/time to participate in a journal club.
- We are in a small rural community in northwestern BC. I wish I could attend a workshop or event.
- I am hoping to start a journal club specific to our volunteer organization.
- United Way Middle Years Community of Practice.

In general, many of the interview participants were interested in participating in journal club meetings or other workshops. One interview participant, who worked for a hospice organization, indicated she would like to participate in a journal club, but due to time constraints, proposed a different format:

So it would be more of reading the article, reflecting on our own practice in hospice, and just writing a couple of paragraphs and sending that forward. So whether that's a

journal club or a blog, that's probably how I could interact with your services (Interview 13).

Those who had participated in journal club meetings were very enthusiastic. Another interview participant, who is the executive director of a seniors' support organization, said:

So, I'm very aware of the Supporting Seniors' Journal Club. Just fantastic, I've been there a couple of times. I've also encouraged members of our team who are also connected to Community Scholars to try to participate in those as well. Sometimes, time is the biggest limiting factor. Like for right now, I'm really excited. There's a journal article right now about how to support seniors during emergencies, and obviously, it's very timely, very relevant. That's the focus of the next "Seniors" journal club. I'm just not sure we're going to have the time and energy to put into that right now but otherwise, I love that it's happening (Interview 17).

The CSP has also organized different kinds of events around research and scholarship, or assisted Community Scholars with their research initiatives. For example, one interview participant recalled an event that Heather helped organize, wherein her organization was able to hold a public engagement session asking for ideas about how to improve new immigrant experiences in Vancouver:

So we were in the phase of the project where we were trying to come up with ideas because we had our themes, we had all of the problems and pain points newcomers that we talked to were facing, and we wanted to crowdsource ideas. So we made a board game that would allow people to rapidly come up with solutions, like even if they were wacky, and then we kind of took parts of all of those ideas to come up with the ones we have now. So Heather actually hosted... It was awesome, SFU donated space down at the Harbor Center, and [Heather had it] catered to have a public event, to do this ideation gathering session. Yeah, so that kind of collaboration, even though that wasn't necessarily Community Scholars, like me using Community Scholars, it was still a connection I got through Community Scholars. And she invited her librarian network, and put it on Twitter, and so we got lots of librarians who, yeah, are superb and have great ideas and are really, I think, innovative by nature. I'm not just saying that! (Interview 10).

One Community Scholar commented on how a community of practice has benefitted his career, growing spontaneously or informally out of a CSP journal club:

I've been to a few where, you know, like the journal writing, reading club. And that's been great, I like the system of bringing you together with people you don't know and talking. But I've also, from that first cohort, developed a bit of a community of practice. And then as I go along in my career, and you go to different workshops and you meet somebody who has got the same interests, I might pass them along somebody I'm reading, or an academic, or a scholar who's published something. And

we would share that, and then we actually would have Whiskey Nights or have a pizza or something, and just frame it as that, rather than frame it as a journal writing club or a reading club (Interview 2).

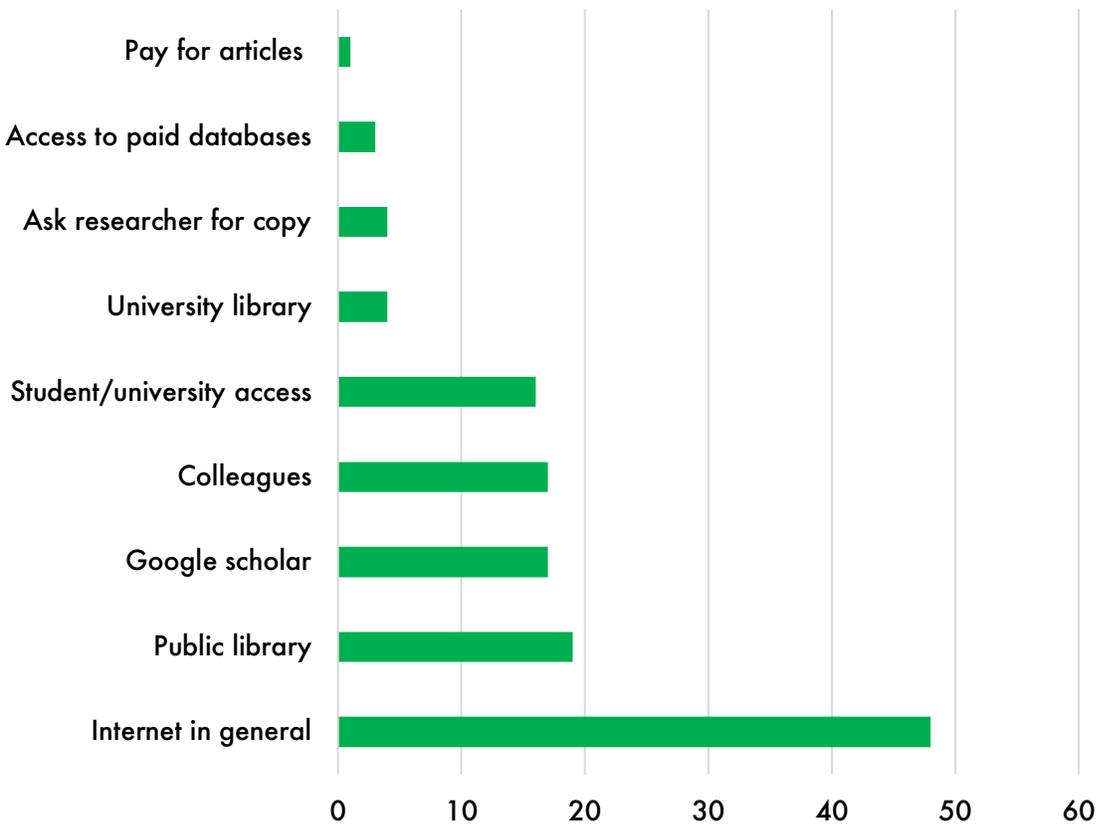
This idea of the CSP working to build community was something program organizers had envisioned from the beginning, and others have echoed this idea throughout the evaluation process.

### *3. Access to research, program impact, and research impact*

The Community Scholars Program is an innovative answer to the problem of access to research for community and non-profit organizations that are unable to pay for research portal access. Several questions in the survey asked how having access to peer-reviewed, university-produced research impacted program participants. Community Scholars overwhelmingly commented that access to research is important for the work they do and that having access has benefited the organization where they work. When asked about the impacts of being a part of CSP, one interview participant who formerly worked for the United Way emphasized: "There's so much I couldn't have done without having access to that scholarly database. And so it's almost hard to put a finger on it, because it's so broad" (Interview 12). Another person who runs a research organization that focuses on youth health issues exclaimed during our online interview that, "It's been absolutely invaluable to us" (Interview 16). Having access to research allows participants in the CSP to use evidence-based research to support organizational practices and programs, improve engagement with their clients, staff, and the public, and stay up to date in their fields.

**Question 2** asked how Community Scholars obtained research information to support their work prior to having access to the Community Scholars Program portal. 106 people answered this open-ended question. This question elicited a range of responses and demonstrated the creative ways that respondents tried to access scholarly research. Some people expressed frustration, exclaiming "it was tough" or "it would be challenging." Respondents most often mentioned using the internet in general (48 people), and Google specifically, to find publicly accessible research or grey literature that supported their research needs. One person said, "often it would come down to running a search online and then spending hours investigating the hits to see if something was truly a 'hit'."

**Figure 9** Q2 Before you had access to the Community Scholars Program portal how did you find research information to support your work (n=106)



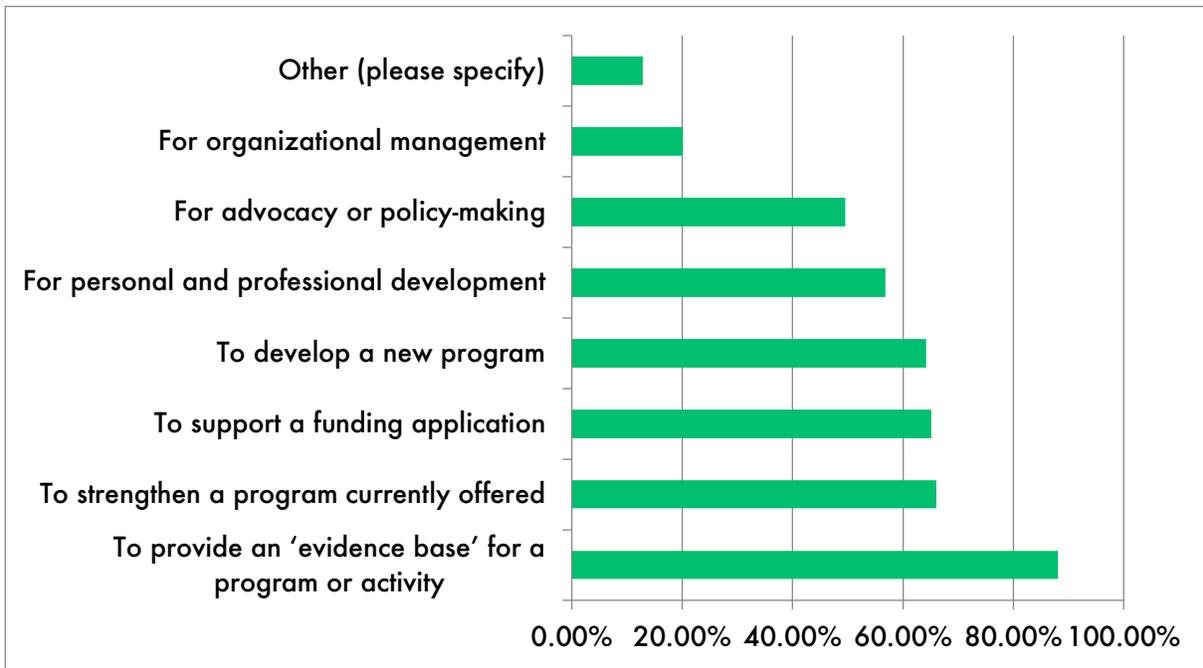
One respondent lamented, “At one time I worked at a university. Since then there has been a huge gap in my life.” Another Community Scholar shared that “for the most part, it involved going to our local library and having books sent to us (we live in a small rural community) [...] It was often a long process with little in the way of results.” A few respondents (4) would ask researchers directly for a copy of their publication, and some indicated that they would ask knowledgeable colleagues for information. One or two people mentioned accessing ResearchGate and Academia.edu, learning from seminars, or seeking out census data. Only three people had access to commercial databases or paid subscriptions, and only one person mentioned that they paid for individual articles. This last point is significant because it indicates that Community Scholars are not willing or able to pay for access to research, but their participation in the program, and responses to the survey, indicate that they highly value this access.

As seen in the open-ended answers to **Question 3** in the survey (presented in table and graphic format), Community Scholars need access to research for many different reasons.

**Table 1 Q3 For what purposes do you or others in your organization need access to research (n=109)**

	Responses	
	Percentage	Count
To provide an 'evidence base' for a program or activity	88.07%	96
To strengthen a program currently offered	66.06%	72
To support a funding application	65.14%	71
To develop a new program	64.22%	70
For personal and professional development	56.88%	62
For advocacy or policymaking	49.54%	54
For organizational management	20.18%	22
Other (please specify)	12.84%	14

**Figure 10 Q3 For what purposes do you or others in your organization need access to research<sup>10</sup> (n=109)**



A large majority (88%) of respondents need access to research for the purpose of “evidence-based practice,” with the next three categories being of almost equal importance, “strengthen programming,” “funding applications,” and “develop programming.” Fourteen respondents

<sup>10</sup> Note that at the request of CSP librarians, both data tables and visual charts are provided where it is warranted.

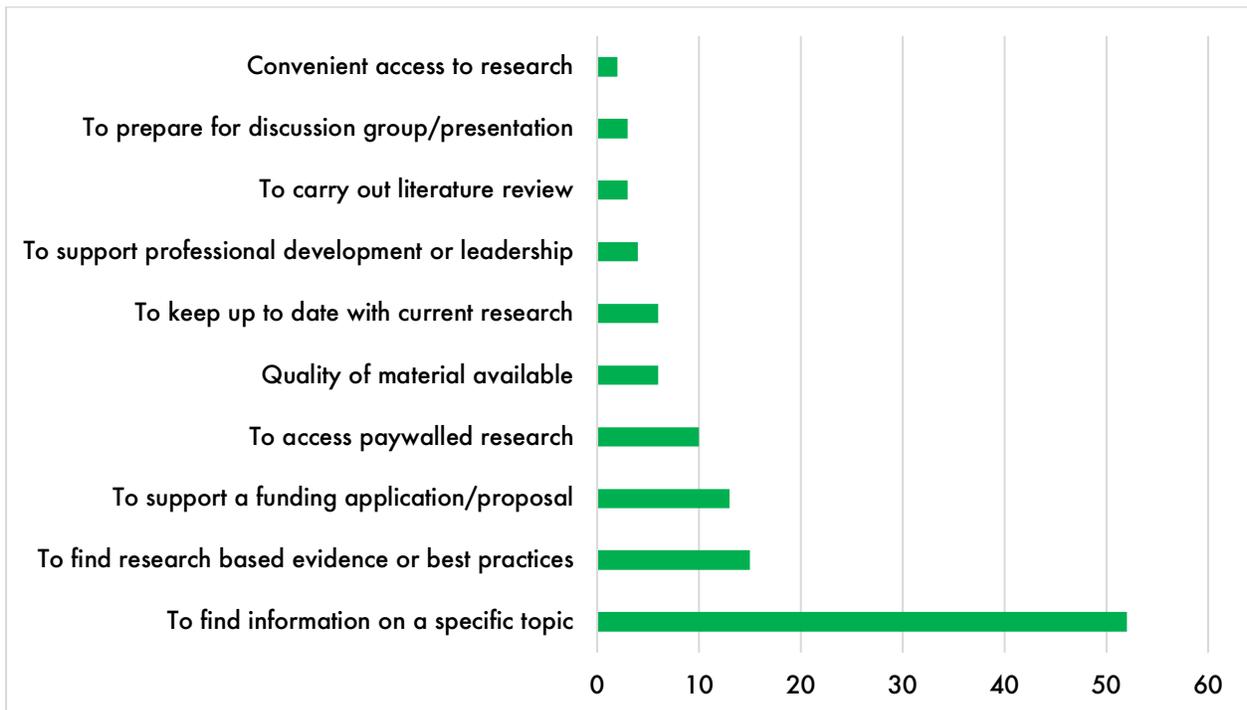
used the “other” category to add to the list, mentioning “for archival purposes,” “leadership development,” and “for the love of Science.”

**Question 5** was an open-ended question that asked Community Scholars about their reasons for using the portal the last time they recall using it. Responses were analyzed textually and coded manually.

**Table 2** Q5 Thinking back to your most recent use, what prompted you to use the Community Scholars portal? (n=92)

	Responses	
To find information on a specific topic	57%	52
To find research-based evidence or best practices	16%	15
To support a funding application/proposal	14%	13
To access paywalled research	11%	10
Quality of material available	7%	6
To keep up to date with current research	7%	6
To support professional development or leadership	4%	4
To carry out literature review	3%	3
To prepare for discussion group/presentation	3%	3
Convenient access to research	2%	2

**Figure 11** Q5 What prompted you to use the Community Scholars portal? (n=92)



The most commonly mentioned reason for using the Community Scholars portal was to find information on a specific topic to support work or program development (52; 57%). For example, one respondent mentioned a specific research need they had in their organization:

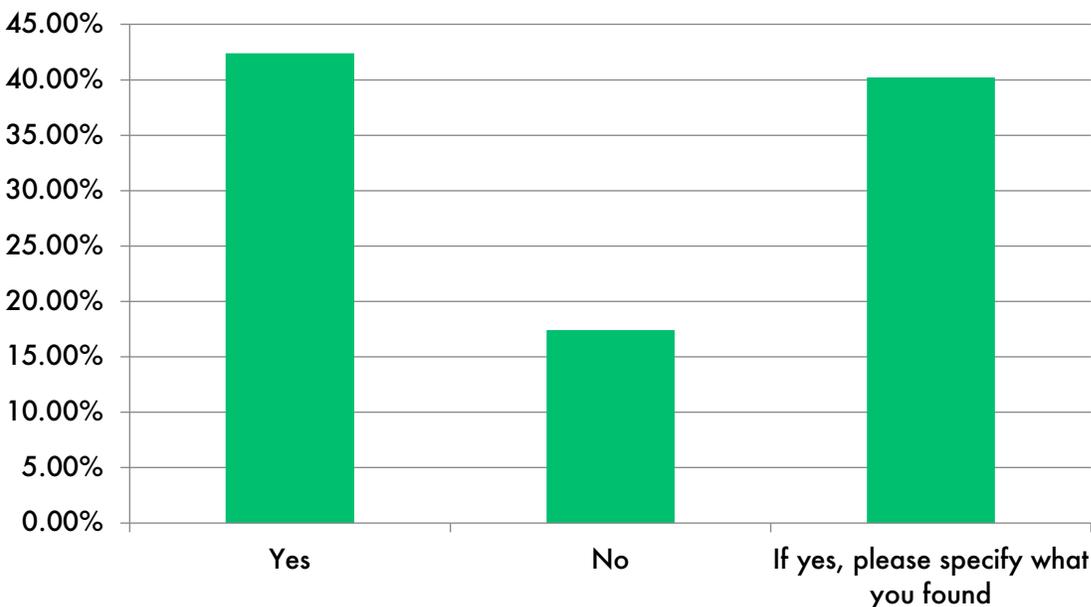
I work as a fundraiser for a charity working to prevent child/youth sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in BC. As this crime often goes unreported, statistics about the issue and information on the important of preventative education for young people can be hard to find.

Many respondents also were prompted to find “evidence” or best practices to support programming, training, and policy for their organizations (15). Other respondents referred to the features of the Community Scholars portal, such as the ease and convenience of using the portal (2), giving them “convenient access to content from my desk”; the ability to access paywalled research not available elsewhere (10); and the quality of information available, referring specifically to the depth, diversity, reliability, or credibility of content (6).

A few people were prompted to use the portal for professional development or leadership (4). One person shared that “I wanted to ensure that I have current information on a topic that I had been asked to make a presentation about.” Finally, three respondents were using the portal for a literature review, and three people commented that they were reading articles for discussion purposes, such as for a journal club meeting or presentation.

**Question 6** asked respondents about how successful their last search had been.

**Figure 12** Q6 In this most recent case, did you find any resources that helped you? (n=92)



Seventy-six participants were successful in finding research they were seeking, and 37 respondents shared details about what they found in their latest search. The following comments demonstrate the wide range of topics that are important to Community Scholars:

- Research related to community-living older adults, as well as those who live in assisted living and long-term care;
- Research & statistics on violence against women, Indigenous women, and girls;
- Employment Statistics for people with intellectual disabilities;
- Crime prevention strategies; and
- I found articles on the topic I searched that guided me in developing a counselling program for substance use treatment.

Some participants expressed satisfaction or thankfulness to have found helpful sources:

I found the full paper which had only been published recently (within the last month) and was very pleased to have it as it allowed me/us to keep up to date with the latest research in our field.

Other Community Scholars mentioned very specific resources that they were able to access:

- Foreword for neuroplasticity and neurorehabilitation by Edward Taub;
- A Joyce Green article on Indigenous women and Canadian citizenship, and an article by Bonnie Burstow about radical understandings of trauma and trauma work;
- Specifically one on the impact of Greek fraternity life on campus rape culture.

Less than 20% of respondents to this question (16 people) were not successful in their most recent search. In some cases, the portal did not contain the information they needed, as not all disciplines, especially in the sciences, are represented. In this case, Community Scholars expressed the hope that more holdings would become available. Some participants may also need further training on how to search the portal effectively or need specialized librarian assistance to help them find specific resources.

Finally, **Question 9** and **Question 10** asked survey respondents about the success of their searches and whether they experienced positive impacts from having access to research.

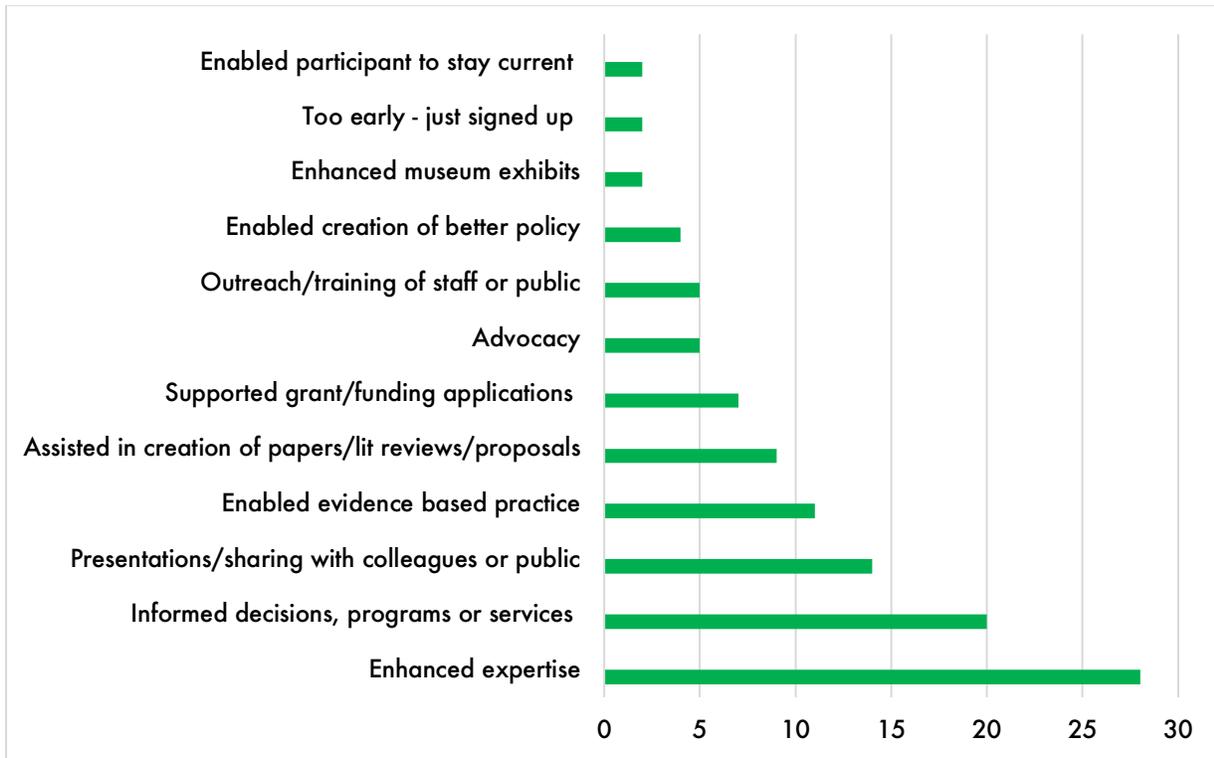
Referring to the whole experience of using the Community Scholars portal, rather than just one instance, **Question 9** asked “**During the time you've had access to the Community Scholars portal have you ever found journal articles in the portal that were useful to you or your organization?**” Of the 92 people that answered this question an overwhelming number of participants chose “yes” (86; 93%) with only 5 (5%) choosing “maybe” and 1 (1%) commenting “Not yet but I will continue trying.”

The purpose of **Question 10** was to encourage Community Scholars to share their experiences of being a part of the CSP and to tap into whether the content of the CSP portal, the research itself, had impacts for them or their organization.

**Table 3 Q10 If you have been able to apply what you have learned from reading research journal articles (or other resources), please share any personal stories (positive or negative) where you were able to use the knowledge you may have gained from being a part of the CSP (n=64)**

	Responses	
Enhanced expertise	28	44%
Improved/informed decision-making, program development or service delivery	20	31%
Presentations/sharing with colleagues or public	14	22%
Enabled evidence-based practice	11	17%
Assisted in creation of background papers/literature reviews/proposals	9	14%
Supported grant/funding applications	7	11%
Advocacy	5	8%
Outreach/training of staff or public	5	8%
"Yes", N/A or Blank	5	8%
Enabled creation of better policy	4	6%
Enhanced museum exhibits	2	3%
Stay current	2	3%
Too early - just signed up	2	3%

**Figure 13 Q10 Please share any personal stories where you were able to use the knowledge you may have gained from being a part of the CSP (n=64)**



Sixty-four people responded with many positive examples of impact gained through their participation in the Community Scholars program. Community scholars were able to produce evidence-based research proposals (11), grant applications (7), literature reviews and background papers (9), and other publications:

- The access has been invaluable. The learning from it has contributed to a published paper, informed other papers and internal reports, and helped inform our program development processes.
- I was writing a proposal and hitting a brick wall (nothing new ...). A quick search of the topic helped me focus and get past that brick wall. The library helps the unknown become known and provides specific information to break through knowledge barriers.

Numerous people shared stories about how they were able to enhance their expertise in their particular fields (28). These areas of research ranged from Alzheimer’s disease, to seniors’ housing, adult education, teen anxiety and restorative justice. Some respondents were able to actually quantify the program’s impact, writing that:

- One grant proposal required statistics and sources to support our request for funding. Using data and journal sources found through your portal helped us secure \$255,000 in funding.
- Last year I was asked to participate in an international course as a subject matter expert on child rights. Although, that is my area of work and focus I was anxious to ensure that I 'knew enough,' was current and was able to provide knowledge to a broad range of participants. Through CSP I was able to deepen my knowledge and gain different perspectives. Not only did this improve my confidence, it also ensured that I was able to coach 100+ participants.

Many others were able to train colleagues or the public (5); create better policy for their organization (4); engage in advocacy (5) with knowledge they gained from research they accessed through the Community Scholars Program; and stay current in their profession (3).

- I needed to dispel some myths about charging fees for services in my organizational management and I was able to find a great research article examining this topic, which I shared with the team and it helped us to make more clear decisions.
- Accessing literature on the circular economy enabled our organization to identify key themes and issues associated with e-waste and also identify potential solutions. This research led us to approach a number of different stakeholders and develop plans. From here we created a partnership with an international NGO to support initiatives in the US and Africa (Senegal and Kenya).
- I now have scholarly evidence to show that the more information a student discloses to his/her post-secondary instructor, the better able and willing they are to make reasonable accommodations for the students' disability. This will help in advocacy, and when people come to me with the question 'Do I or do I not disclose my disability?'

During almost every research interview, participants described how the CSP has impacted their work. Many of the examples of research impact discussed during the interviews are extremely important to the work of their respective organizations and very inspiring from the perspective of positive social change or innovations that resulted. Community Scholars have found research to support reports, policy, presentations, public consultation, training, and many other forms of knowledge mobilization. In this way, Community Scholars act as a bridge between academics and the public, translating research for their clients, their co-workers, and the greater community. A couple of interview participants used the metaphor of a bridge to describe the CSP, noting that:

It's all bridge building, I actually consider myself a bridge builder. And right now, it's moving along the lines of between indigenous and non-indigenous community, but there are so many bridges between community and institutions, all of these bridges that we've been talking about. And I think Community Scholars is a flash point for that also, it's a bridge in that sense (Interview 4).

Another person pointed out, however, that:

[E]verybody knows about the chasm between practice and between academics and there are lots of reasons for that. But it's very difficult to bridge, and I'd suggest even that bridge is a fragile one because, even when people do read the material, they may not necessarily know how to exactly apply it to get the most out of it. And so they may apply it while using an old framing, old paradigm, old assumptions, old practice. It really requires, I think, a special skill to be able to take theory and actually apply it into practice (Interview 6).

One community scholar described how her organization produced a research report on the problem of stigma, using the portal to provide background information about the concept. This report has been featured on their website and translated into blogs, videos, and news articles to promote awareness regarding the dangers of stigma in society, particularly for unhoused people and those with substance use disorders.

Researchers from the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit research organization that studies youth and health issues in BC, used the CSP portal to inform a participant action research (PAR) initiative that included youth in policy discussions about opioid and drug use.

Other participants have benefitted both professionally and personally from being part of the CSP. One interview participant, Sue Skeates, had significant barriers to overcome when she first joined the program. She works for a small non-profit hospice society in northern British Columbia that supports caregivers, children, and volunteers to provide end-of-life counselling. This hospice society was on the verge of collapse when they signed up for the CSP. She has been in the program for "about 4 years," and although she initially struggled with using the portal, the personal support she received from the UNBC librarian enabled her to learn more about mentoring, write successful research grants, and enhance the programming offered by the non-profit where she works:

So for example, last summer I was looking for caregiving programs for family and friend caregivers, and so I used a lot of that information to write the proposal and we got a quarter million dollar grant over two years. So it's a big success for us. When I started working here I couldn't read, I couldn't write, I'd had a head injury. And I was just doing this as a bookmark, and I'd come in here and I would do nothing for the three hours. I was supposed to be here through the day as a volunteer, and then as I started getting some skills back, doing this stuff with the library was... Obviously, before my head injury I could do things with the library, but it was a huge motivator for me to recover my reading and to getting back into things like research and stuff like that. So there's my personal gains. Our hospice society, it really was falling apart and it really should have dissolved. It didn't, and now we're doing really well.

Another Community Scholar became interested in the scholarship around management and leadership which influenced him to return to university for a graduate degree. He quipped, "I

didn't realize how much I liked to learn 'til I got a chance to do it." The CSP also helped him in his work with people with developmental disabilities, where he learned more about sexuality, feminism, and of how to deal with the use of pornography among his community living residents with developmental disabilities. He was also able to use action research to translate some of his findings into a video series to support community living that included perspectives from people living with developmental disabilities.

Not all impacts from the program are tangible, however. One person who works with seniors felt that when she reads a research article, "I can't apply it directly, but I would keep it somewhere in my mind when I make decisions" (Interview 3). This addresses an essential feature of much social sciences and humanities knowledge; that is, it is not always possible to measure the impacts of this knowledge. It serves to educate a person broadly, rather than deliver something visible or countable (Bastow, Dunlevy & Tinkler, 2013; Severinson, 2017).

Overall, Community Scholars responded very positively to questions that aimed at understanding the impacts of the program. Having access to research changed practices, improved engagement with their clients, staff and public, and allowed deeper understanding of the areas in which they work and the problems they face.

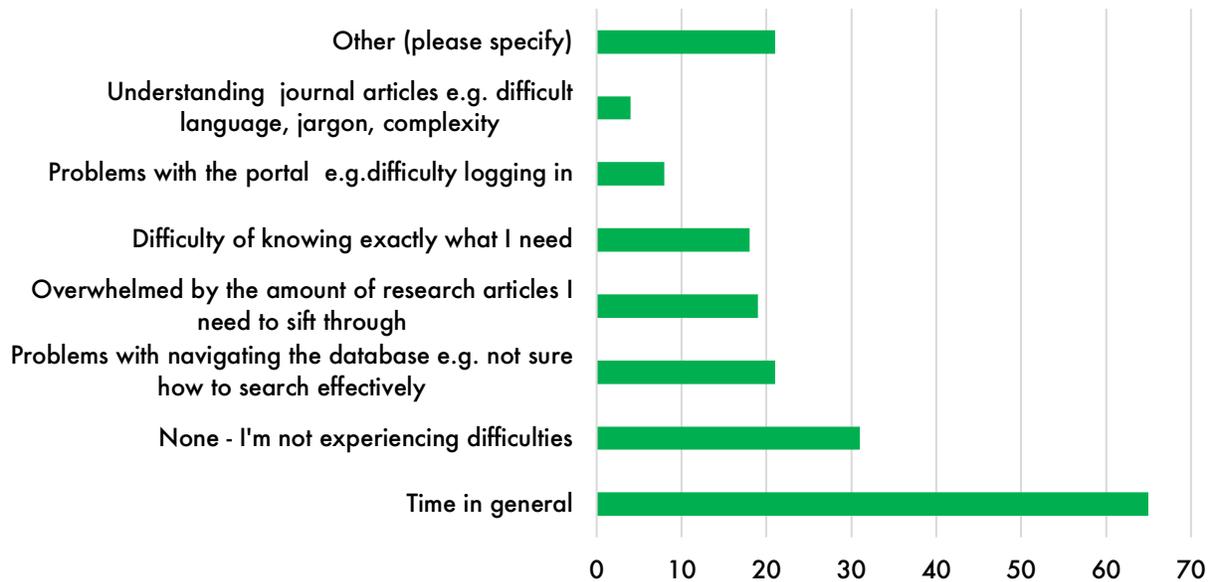
## 4. Challenges for Community Scholars

One of the main reasons for conducting this developmental evaluation of the Community Scholars Program was to understand how best to support program participants. While the responses described above document a positive reception and a multitude of benefits of the program, other responses highlighted some barriers to participation. When asked directly if "any of the barriers below prevent you from successfully finding the research or information that you need?," as we did in **Question 11**, participants responded:

**Table 4** Q11 Do any of the barriers below prevent you from successfully finding the research or information that you need (n = 108)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Time in general	60.19%	65
None - I'm not experiencing difficulties	28.70%	31
Problems with navigating the database e.g. not sure how to search effectively	19.44%	21
Other (please specify)	19.44%	21
Overwhelmed by the amount of research articles I need to sift through	17.59%	19
Difficulty of knowing exactly what I need	16.67%	18
Problems with the portal e.g.difficulty logging in	7.41%	8
Understanding journal articles e.g. difficult language, jargon, complexity	3.70%	4
Total Respondents: 108		

**Figure 14 Q11 Do any of the barriers below prevent you from successfully finding the research or information that you need (n = 108)**



Time, in general, is the most commonly reported barrier, with just over 60% of people stating it prevented them from finding the research or information they need. In addition, considering that most of the Community Scholars work in community organizations where budgets are tight and the problems these organizations are tasked with are complex, it may be helpful to know that many Community Scholars have similar work-related pressures that pull them away from what might seem like time-consuming and indulgent research. One person commented:

It's not only time to find articles, but time to read them and then the time and resources needed to apply them. Non-profit/charities are already stretched woefully thin, and these sorts of undertakings in social services simply aren't adequately resourced or supported.

Time was also barrier for the Community Scholars who participated in the interviews. Eleven out of twenty people interviewed mentioned that they lacked the time to devote to research. This is a systemic issue for a sector that is typically understaffed, underfunded, and working to capacity. One participant said:

That's part of the challenge is that we're all incredibly stretched in social services. And that's part of the challenge is there's all this rich information online and we need access to it. And yet, it's just hard enough kind of grinding through the day sometimes (Interview 17).

Another Community Scholar said in an interview:

I think there are tons of incredible community or grassroots organizations that are working with theory and developing theory and developing knowledge and doing grounded research. But they don't necessarily have the time or internal capacity to go through a database or look up articles. And I think that's part of how, in our work at \_\_\_\_\_, we can put out strong position papers, they can be well-researched, and hopefully, aid those folks that are making direct change (Interview 7).

This argument, that some organizations have more capacity to use the CSP as a resource, might be something for the CSP to consider when deciding who gets access. From the beginning of the program, access has been allocated simply according to demand rather than on whether potential users will make the best use of this access to research. However, this kind of gatekeeping might prevent smaller organizations, that may grow exponentially with access to research, from ever having the opportunity to participate.

While lack of time is not something the CSP can alleviate, other responses to Question 11 are barriers that the program can work towards improving. For example, some people had difficulty navigating the portal, were overwhelmed by the amount of research articles they needed to sift through, or were unsure of their information needs or search parameters. Two of the barriers refer to the Community Scholars portal, where almost 20% had issues with navigation or searching effectively, while a few people (8) mentioned they had difficulty logging in. The CSP has little control over the look and feel of the CSP portal, however, because it is third-party software. Still, the librarians can troubleshoot issues, and Community Scholars can attend workshops if they need a refresher on how to navigate the portal.

Only a small percentage (3.7%) had difficulty understanding the content of research journal articles. While this may be something that the CSP cannot directly address, additional training and guidance could help Community Scholars who may not have had research training. One interview participant candidly referred to the frustration she sometimes feels reading academic writing styles:

You know what, sometimes academia just [...] me off for many reasons. I think everyone gets that. Right? So sometimes I just don't feel like going through the jargon, and sitting down and reading, and because I always tend to think of like, "Yeah, I understand this, but who the hell else would understand any of this?" And... Yeah, so I just got mad at reading these journal articles. [laughter] So that's like an emotional barrier, I guess, you can say [laughter] (Interview 10).

Twenty-one respondents also provided written comments to this question ("Other" category). These comments give more context for the kinds of barriers that Community Scholars face. For example, one person specified that the "time it takes to use and find academic research" is a barrier for them, whereas another said that:

There are two main issues—somewhat related to time. 1) Most academic articles need translating—so that takes work 2) In the social innovation space, often academic research is a long way behind practice—but that is still good to know :).

A few people referred to organizational constraints, such as their job description not specifically enabling them to do research or their organization not adopting an evidence-based approach to their programming or operations. A few others mentioned specific technical issues they had with logging in or the lack of organization of the portal for user friendliness. One person referred to their “rusty research and academic citation/writing skills,” while another shared that an online orientation session offered by the CSP librarians “made me feel very welcome and I would feel comfortable to contact them if I was stumped.”

The Community Scholars are also divided along rural/urban lines. Sprinkled through the survey, some respondents commented that they do not have access to a public library or live far away from the university library associated with the CSP. Roughly 1/3 of survey respondents live outside metro Vancouver and the lower mainland. One person lamented that they could not attend a live event due to living far away.

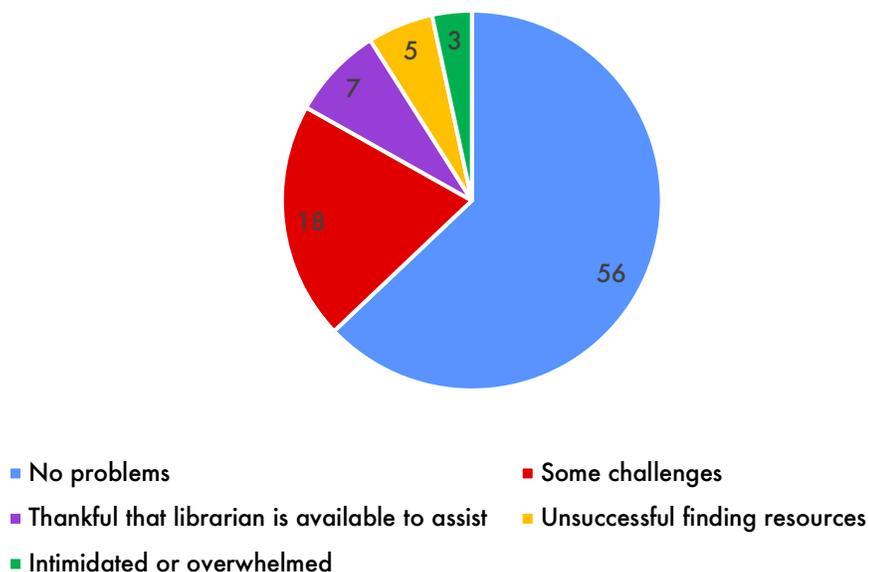
While participants do have the option of participating remotely via video conferencing with the live events, connecting Community Scholars has sometimes been a challenge. Scholars tried to connect remotely to the journal club meetings I attended; however, the connection or audio was not good quality, and remote participants dropped off the meeting. This is something that may need to be addressed technologically. With more people becoming accustomed to video conferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to communicate with Community Scholars could also improve. In light of this, the journal club meetings are now taking place completely online.

Other technological challenges involve the CSP portal itself. There was a wide range of user experiences regarding how they interface with the portal. **Question 7** gave Community Scholars the opportunity to comment in an open-ended format about their most recent use of the portal.

**Table 5** Q7 Thinking back to the most recent time you used the CSP portal to search for information, how did it go? Were you easily able to find the information you needed? What would have made this process easier for you? (n=89)

	Responses	
No problems	56	63%
Some challenges	18	20%
Thankful that librarian is available to assist	7	8%
Unsuccessful finding resources	5	6%
Intimidated or overwhelmed	3	3%

**Figure 15** Q7 Still thinking back to the most recent time you used the CSP portal to search for information, how did it go? Were you easily able to find the information you needed? What would have made this process easier for you? (n=89)



Eighty-nine people answered this open-ended question. The majority of respondents to this question (56 people) had no problems with the portal and found what they needed in the portal. Some of these people commented that they had research expertise, having done graduate work or research for their profession which helped them navigate confidently. The high education level of many Community Scholars is one demographic feature that contributes to the high number of “no problem” responses. Some of the comments from Community Scholars also reinforce that although they may not have been “successful” in their search, they are confident in their searching skills:

In this case, research through this portal and through other sources clarified that research on this topic has not been conducted with any rigour by any prior scholar so I did not find much. But it was helpful to confirm this as it enables me to plan a funding proposal in order to carry it out.

Eighteen people had some minor challenges or frustrations finding what they needed. Their critique of the Community Scholars portal included the following:

- Full text of articles not available/paywalled (most frequent comment)
- Problems with logging in
- Difficulty downloading PDF of article
- Using the portal not intuitive at first
- Difficulty finding Canadian sources

- Search not sorted with most relevant or recent at the top
- Articles out of date
- Unfamiliarity with Boolean searching
- Portal did not seem to have the breadth of topics expected
- Menus should be enhanced

Several people (5) commented that they were unsuccessful in finding what they needed or navigating the portal, and 3 respondents shared that they were overwhelmed or intimidated when trying to use it:

I feel a bit intimidated and overwhelmed trying to use the portal. I can see the benefits it could have but I rarely have time to delve in deep which is what it feels I would require to make more use of it.

At least one other person mentioned they did not have the time to spend learning how to search, because they are very busy at their work. Finally, 7 respondents were thankful that they were able to consult with the Community Scholars librarians if they needed assistance:

It was easy to find the information. I love being a community scholar because of the ease of finding stuff and having a librarian as back-up support when I can't find what I am looking for.

The interview research participants were able to provide even more detailed context and feedback regarding their challenges with using the portal:

I participated in one online seminar that, Kate, I think, ran in terms of how to improve your skills using the portal, and that was really helpful. [...] So I can't really say there's a major problem with the portal. I think it's just that you get better the more you do something. And if I'm going to look at the part that [...] maybe it's obvious [...] how do you access the full article? There's a little link that says, view full article or a symbol for a redirect over here. The box with the arrow. And you don't always in the beginning know that that's what you're supposed to click on, because that one isn't maybe as obvious, because you get distracted by the title and the name and if you click on it, it takes you often to the journals.

Sometimes, people commented on how the CSP has removed barriers for them. For example, one interview participant said:

We're based in East Hastings, so getting to UBC is an hour and then getting back from UBC is an hour, and completely unrealistic for young people who you're trying to engage, and they're never going to walk into an intimidating academic library and stuff. So the Community Scholars Program came out and it was like, "Oooh."  
[laughter] Like this is going to meet our needs. [Interview 16]

During some of the research interviews, Community Scholars discussed the challenges they experience conducting research themselves. Several Scholars admitted to hiring graduate students to have access to research databases before they joined CSP, but one Scholar went further with this idea. This interview participant is the Executive Director of a “Lifelong Learning Centre,” working with people to improve adult literacy and expand awareness about this problem. He was enthusiastic about the idea of the CSP helping to connect Scholars with graduate students or researchers who could assist with research questions. He saw this as a benefit for both students and non-profit organizations:

What I would say is, it is an interesting space, as I said to you, for research questions to be posed. So even if Community Scholars, as an interface, has a thing saying – because sometimes research questions are difficult for students to come up with, even if there was something on the Community Scholars – that said, "Have you noticed anything in the work you're doing that are questions that need to be answered that haven't been, or that need to be explored that haven't been?" (Interview 18).

## *5. The CSP librarians*

As the CSP has expanded, so too has the role of the Community Scholar Program’s librarians. Initially, Heather de Forest was seconded part-time from her role as an SFU librarian to help set up the program and act as the primary resource for participants in the program. As more university libraries joined the program, and the numbers of Community Scholars grew, three more librarians were recruited to assist with the program for their respective geographical areas. The librarians lead and develop many different aspects of the program from recruiting, to training and orientation, to personal or group consultation with Community Scholars who need help with research.

Over the course of the project, I spoke with the CSP librarians about their roles and gathered feedback from the program. These meetings were essential for providing background understanding for this developmental analysis and also greatly contributed to the overall recommendations section.

The survey contained three questions aimed specifically at providing feedback for librarians regarding their role. **Question 12** asked “Have you ever reached out to a Community Scholars librarian for assistance?” 35% of 109 respondents had contacted a librarian for assistance, whereas the majority, 65% had not. This result is consistent with data from other questions, such as that 63% of respondents have no problems with the portal (Q7) and over 60% of Community Scholars have graduate level education and experience (Q18).

The CSP librarians, however, provide other kinds of support besides troubleshooting. **Question 13** (discussed above) asked whether respondents had participated in any other Community Scholars activities. The librarians are responsible for creating and curating orientation workshops, research training—such as how to search more effectively—and

research workshops for individual organizations. Many of these workshops are now available online on the CSP website.

Seventy-five people responded to **Question 14** which asked, “How might the CSP librarian in your area provide further assistance?” These open-ended comments were manually coded, the results of which are compiled in Table 6, below. Overwhelmingly, responses to this question were very positive. Forty-two comments pertained to how the Community Scholars were satisfied with the help they received from the CSP librarians and wanted them to “keep it up”; 10 of these people had a “glowing response” and used words like, “great,” “fantastic,” and “wonderful” to describe the librarians. Five people said they did not need further help, 6 indicated that “all is well,” meaning they are satisfied with the program and could not suggest any improvements, and 5 indicated that they didn’t need any assistance.

Some people provided ideas for how the librarians could help them, with 14 people commenting that they would like more training or guidance, and 4 asking for an individualized workshop from the librarians. Another 4 people felt that they lacked the time to consult the librarians. One person admitted they did not know how to contact the librarians, and another did not even think to ask for help.

**Table 6 Q14 How might the CSP librarian in your area provide further assistance?**

Q14 How might the CSP librarian in your area provide further assistance? (n=75)		
	Responses	
Not sure or n/a	17	23%
More training/guidance	14	19%
Great availability	13	17%
Librarians helpful	12	16%
Glowing response	10	13%
All is well	6	8%
Communication is great	5	7%
Don't need help	5	7%
Individualized workshop	4	5%
Lack of time	4	5%
Specific suggestions	2	3%
Needed help initially, now self-sufficient	2	3%
Quick response	2	3%
Community of Practice	1	1%
Didn't think to ask	1	1%
How to contact	1	1%

These comments from the survey exemplify the positive responses to this question:

- She is wonderful! I am so at ease giving her a call or dropping her an email, knowing the answer will be just around the corner.”
- I have used her in the past. She provided almost immediate reliable help. Initially I used her a fair bit, but now I am working fairly independently. At all times I know she is accessible.
- The CSP librarian in my area has been consistently warm in reaching out to offer support, both online and through workshops and the journal club - I know that she is available to help and cannot think of anything that would further her availability for assistance.
- The CSP librarian here is very helpful and I believe would be accessible if I required his help.
- I know they are always there and ready to assist. It is mostly a matter of time and initiative on my part.

A few of the survey respondents made specific suggestions for further assistance:

- Maybe more events connecting alumni who work in similar fields (e.g. a "research for the nonprofit sector" event).
- Work with governments and university to shift tax-payer funder research publication to open access journals for the betterment of Canadians and humanity.
- I would also be interested in learning more about critical engagement with ideas.

One Community Scholar was not sure how to access the librarian as, “I live in a remote area within indigenous territory (and work for their council). Remoteness makes it difficult to access resources in person or attend activities.” Others wanted guidance with keyword/Boolean searching (2), help with narrowing searches (2), assistance with logging in, and general navigation help (2).

Seventeen survey participants did not have any suggestions. Two people felt that it didn't occur to them to consult with a librarian, and a couple others thought they would contact the librarians in the future if needed:

I have not, to date, considered accessing the CSP librarian. Come to think of it, I'm not sure it has even occurred to me. I was pretty much of the same mindset in graduate school all the way back to my high school. Perhaps it's a matter of not wanting to bother someone with my problem.

Nearly all of the interview participants mentioned the important role the CSP librarians played in their successful use of the portal, although some of them were not aware of the different workshops offered by the program. Many of the interview participants were very pleased with the personal support they had received from the CSP librarians. One director of a community-based research centre said:

I also hear, over and over again, about how useful the librarian is when people get stuck, and how, what a nice attitude they have, and how different people are finding that experience to maybe some other librarians they've encountered (Interview 16).

Another Community Scholar, who has returned to university to do a graduate program, really appreciated the ability to consult with a librarian:

Just having the access to a librarian is huge. To just go over, like, "I don't understand what I'm looking for. I don't even know what, where to start, or how to whittle this down" (Interview 2).

Another community scholar, Sue Skeates, (mentioned previously) joined the program early on but was recovering from a head injury and could barely read, let alone navigate a research portal. In her words, the local librarian, Kealin, was central to her personal recovery:

Kealin was really good with me. Yes, we did do a workshop and it was one-on-one. [...] And then there was the year where I had my password, but it was all still too confusing in my head to really access it, but then my reading got better, and I had different places to put information and that's when I started using it. [...] The librarian, Kealin, is just amazing. So if I forgot my password or whatever, she's just there, it's same-day service, it's always pleasant. I feel like she's like my sister now! (Interview 11).

Interview participants also commented about their "wish list" or suggestions for how to improve the program. One person praised the CSP librarian who had helped them in the past, but also wanted to have another session:

We had a training workshop with a librarian and she was super helpful. In retrospect, it probably wasn't the best time for us to do that as we were busy with other projects to utilize it much immediately following. I think it could be beneficial if we could have another training workshop in conjunction with a specific grant proposal or similar project where we could work through it in a very practical immediate sense (Interview 7).

What I think would be beneficial for our organization is if there was someone who was available to maybe host a half-hour webinar for our society, for everyone to learn about the portal and how to use it. [...] Even to differentiate what's a good source and what's not. [...] Of course, I have a research bias, I think everyone should learn how to do good research (Interview 15).

Community Scholars librarians are attentive, helpful, and dedicated to the program. It is noteworthy that there was not one negative comment regarding any of the workshops or people involved in the CSP.

## 6. Suggestions, improvements and critical feedback

The design of this developmental evaluation ensured that there were opportunities for Community Scholars to comment openly about the program and their experiences. The survey included many open-ended questions, as well as options for comments after each closed/quantitative question. This generated a lot of personal and detailed feedback, some of which offered solutions or suggestions for improvement. The interviews were also geared towards gathering information in greater depth and attempted to understand how individuals were using research in their professions. Finally, discussions with CSP librarians also factored into the discussion around improving the program and helped Dr. Whiteley make sense of the comments from Scholars. Several themes emerged around possible suggestions for improving the Community Scholars Program.

### i. Experience using the Portal

**Question 7** of the survey gathered a good deal of feedback about the portal and was discussed briefly above. While the majority of users are not having issues with using the portal, many commented that they did have issues at one time or that they continue to have issues, and one person has never been successful at logging in. Some people refer to the lack of user-friendliness, or intuitiveness, of the portal, but do acknowledge that it is navigable: “The CSP portal has some challenges, but they are worthwhile for the access that I get to articles.” Comments pertain to the log-in process, the search process, and the downloading articles process. Some people commented that the login area is “hard to find” and one said, “the login is a bit hidden but other than that the search functions the same as other scholarly searching portals.”

Some Community Scholars had specific comments about how to improve the portal commenting that:

- The search tool certainly isn't as sophisticated as I would like. In our area of interest (sports medicine and activity) the search will often bring up very dated studies at the top. I don't recall being able to search geographically either—for government grants in particular focusing on Canadian and North American results would be helpful.
- It was easy, and I just think the menus should be enhanced.
- The site could be better organized for user navigation.

Others had issues with downloading articles:

- I usually find it tricky to find ways to access the full article and to download the PDF file.

## ii. Increasing the number of journals available

Community Scholars quite often expressed disappointment in not being able to access certain articles:

- I discovered that the CSP Portal provided limited access to closed access scientific journals. Looks like I need to be a student or faculty to access most scientific literature.
- I think the breadth of the journals included in the database is still limited.
- Many reports I found that I could only get the abstract, would have to pay for full report.
- I was disappointed that I could not access the article I most wanted to read.
- It was easy but I still couldn't access an article I needed.
- There were too many pay walls. All the good stuff was pay-walled. My alumni access to the college was easier to use.
- Some of the journals I needed were not available, it seems as if the service is somewhat truncated? It is still extremely valuable.
- I have had experience, more than once, where what I wanted was not available via the Community Scholars access.

## iii. Success of instructional opportunities

Comments from Community Scholars, in both the survey and interviews, attest to the successfulness of the instruction they have received from the CSP:

- The training I attended gave good tips for word searches and what language to use for searches...some articles are out of date.
- This process went well. The information session held at VIU by Dana McFarland in winter/spring 2019 (I believe) helped provide orientation to the process.
- I recently participated in the on-line orientation session given by the CSP librarians. They made me feel very welcome and I would feel comfortable to contact them if I was stumped.

Some Scholars, however, also felt that they needed more training or instruction to be more successful in their research goals. These comments revealed that Community Scholars do not always know about the suite of offerings from the program. Some felt that barriers to using the portal could possibly be mitigated by offering training or instruction to assist in using the portal or to teach effective search practices. For example, a few respondents mentioned they would like to know how to narrow search parameters or how to choose keywords, even though these topics are addressed in the on-line CSP training.

#### iv. Academic research and practice

Some Community Scholars commented on the difference between academic research and the practical challenges of their work. While this is not a critique of the CSP *per se*, it is something that affects Community Scholars. A few admitted that their place of work had not adopted evidence-based practice, or that they needed to convince upper management of the need for more engagement with research:

Organization priorities—although there is some conversation around the need for evidence-based research—and the development of performance evaluation within our programs, we haven't been able to develop procedures/rubrics to do so.

A few Community Scholars commented on the limited usefulness of academic research or that they would like different kinds of research beyond journal articles, pointing out that, “research articles tend to be very academic; useful for policy related research but recall there being more limited access to industry related information.”

Several of the interview participants commented on the privileged knowledge found in academic databases. One person said:

I think it's really important that people in universities and in those so-called academic settings really humble themselves, because from the perspective of decolonized methodologies or more community-based or empowerment-based approaches, academic knowledge is actually a site of harm (Interview 1).

Community Scholars also mentioned in the interviews that they are interested in producing research for knowledge mobilization beyond their organization. One director of a seniors support agency said:

We have a major gap both getting that information into the hands of the people working in the community, but then we have as much of a gap if not more so of getting that information from the community into the literature (Interview 17).

In some interviews, Community Scholars discussed the importance of feedback between front-line workers, program developers, and scholars doing research in relevant fields. Another director of a research organization agreed that:

I really like your idea of getting together with other community-based researchers. And I think it's good sometimes [...] trying to bridge the gap in terms of thinking and learning from each other in different ways (Interview 16).

## v. Demand for more resources

**Question 15** asked respondents “Beyond the academic journal articles and e-books of the Community Scholars portal, what other research-related resources would be useful to you in your work? e.g. policy documents, statistics, news media, or historical archives.”

Ninety-four people answered this question and the vast majority were interested in having access to a wide range of additional resources in addition to scholarly journal articles. Community Scholars want access to paywalled statistics, policy documents, news media, and digital historical archives. A few people mentioned having access to theses and dissertations, mapping data, legal documents, and grey literature. One person wrote, “All of those things listed are useful. I would spend hours every day in the portal if I could. It’s wonderful.”

By contrast another person commented:

I think the focus can remain on scholarly articles and e-books as some of the other materials mentioned are more easily accessible otherwise. Perhaps more publishers can be brought on board over time (although the current selection is excellent).

Some people justified why they needed access to more diverse resources. For example, one Community Scholar said, “I would really appreciate historical archives. We do a lot of work with our Indigenous Community and would like access to historical information.” One person mentioned specific search engines or tools like “Statista, Euromonitor/Passport, ProQuest etc.” Finally, one person wondered if there was a resource that could guide them in “where to find funding.”

Interview participants were also asked about their “wish list” items for the CSP. One Community Scholar, who lives 8 hours away from the nearest university library, asked:

I'm starting to think of, 'Okay, now on gathering data. Will I be able to access a researcher to crunch the data?' And I don't mind writing it up, but yeah, putting the data together is going to be a challenge, that is going to be beyond me.

Another Scholar felt she would benefit from access to government data, giving the example:

If the BC ombudsperson comes out with a new report, for example, how do I stay on top of where the good reports are coming from, from health authorities? What's the best way that that information's communicated that I can get access to and so on?

## vi. Intellectual property and copyright

Some responses to the surveys and discussions during the interviews raised issues regarding intellectual property and copyright. For example, some participants mentioned sharing

articles with colleagues, and several admitted they would ask colleagues at universities to send them articles before they joined the CSP. Other organizations relied on hiring students with university database access. Several people admitted sharing their CSP login with someone in their organization.

A question that was asked during the research interviews was whether people turned to the portal for personal research. Surprisingly, only one person admitted to doing this (Interview 3), and others seemed to not have thought of the broader usefulness of the tool in this regard. Perhaps this suggests that participants are not aware of the full suite of knowledge access that the CSP provides; it could also mean that people are thinking of the program only in terms of professional knowledge.

#### vii. Community scholar turnover

CSP librarians have also been challenged to deal with the constantly evolving group of Community Scholars who are leaving or entering the program, or whose contact information changes. The high staff turnover rate within non-profit organizations has created a number of challenges for the program. The CSP librarian, Kate Shuttleworth, described, for example, how after every newsletter mailout, several email addresses would bounce back, indicating that someone has left their role in that organization and is no longer getting email. Before removing them from the Community Scholar database, Kate would then follow up to find out if someone new had taken over this role and if they would like access to the portal.

Several Community Scholars who filled out the survey, and one interview participant, indicated that they had brought their access over with them to new roles, as they had left their original place of employment where they had first joined the CSP. These people seemed apologetic for doing so, indicating that they might not be aware that access to the portal is granted to individuals and not organizations.

## **V. Conclusion**

The main objective of the Community Scholars Program is to provide scholarly research access to people working in non-profit and community organizations in British Columbia. The central purpose of this project was to evaluate how CSP participants are using or benefitting from this improved access to research, gather feedback from participants regarding their use of this resource, and provide guidance for future development and priorities that will support greater impact and sustainability for the program.

What emerged from the consultations with Community Scholars and the CSP librarians is that, while participants highly value this access, additional value is also found in the “culture of scholarship” that is constantly evolving to support its members. The CSP is well on its way to creating a hybrid culture of collegiality and sharing, that allows participants to engage with scholarly research while taking into account the non-profit environment and its features. This culture is different from that which has developed in the academic world, based on mostly Western epistemology and the culture of science, which some might characterize as exclusive, competitive, or inaccessible. Rather, the CSP offers many kinds of support to its members, is inclusive of all kinds of “scholars” and many kinds of knowledge, and aims to be accessible for people working in non-profit and community support sectors who are pressured by lack of time and resources. This added value helps to bridge educational gaps for Community Scholars and enhances their research capacity. Although not all Community Scholars are aware of these additional program features, many research participants have taken advantage of the specialized assistance provided by the CSP librarians. Creating a culture of scholarship means that Scholars have a support network if they need it. In addition, being part of this community empowers Community Scholars in a number of ways, as so many of the stories from this evaluation attest.

Finally, this report provides a starting point for the next phase of development for the Community Scholars Program. While the abundance of observations, suggestions, and recommendations in this report indicate that there are many possible next steps for the Program, CSP’s team of librarians, visionaries, funders, and publishers should be very proud of what the program has accomplished in a short amount of time and with a limited budget. The program broke significant barriers in establishing a way for community researchers not affiliated with a university to access academic research. The success of this achievement is exemplified by a short plea from one of the Community scholars during the last few minutes of our research interview: “Andrea, I would be a bad Executive Director if I didn’t add ‘please don’t take away our login.’”

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