

Maple Ridge Economic Summit – Best Practices for Connected Communities

Academic Panel Q & A

As part of the online registration process for the 2009 Maple Ridge Economic Summit – Best Practices for Connected Communities, registrants were invited to submit questions for feedback and responses by the Summit's Academic Panel. While the final Summit agenda format did not permit time for this feedback, we are grateful for the support and insights of Dr. John McKendry of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, the panel moderator, who volunteered his time to address the questions. His responses are as follows.

Question: How do local high technology companies begin a dialogue with local post secondary education institutions intended to lead to better understanding of what each can provide the other.

Bill Campbell, Skyway West

Answer: There are several points at which a technology company can connect to an area of a university that is relevant to their business, product(s), R&D, and so forth. It's a good idea to talk to another company, if you know one that has relationships with a local university that they find beneficial and likely to continue for the long term. You might find you have a choice among several universities and end up contacting one that is particularly strong and well-known in the area that is of greatest interest to you. Remember that all universities are not equal as some decide to specialize in some fields in a comprehensive way while others may have no presence or a narrow presence. Like most things, it depends what you're looking for and what you want to achieve. And it's essential to have a good idea about what it is your company wants to achieve in a relationship that may involve a contractual alliance (pretty common) or some other level of relationship. Having take this step, an initial review of the selected university's or universities website(s) is worthwhile and will reveal some key coordinates of administrators, faculty or staff. If, for example, the company's interest is in engineering then contact the Dean of Engineering is a good start. On the other hand an interest in computer science or biochemistry or applied mathematics might best be pursued by going directly to the Head of these areas. This might be a Chair of the Mathematics Department or a Director of a School of Computing Science. The organizational terminology varies depending on the university. If you just can't seem to find the right connection then contact the university's Vice President, Academic & Provost and explain your situation and you're very likely to get the right connection the first time. Most universities, especially when it comes to 'applied' fields of education and research are most interested in alliances with corporations.

Question: What resources can universities provide to aid Independent technology-based businesses to develop new markets and services for same? *Robert McNulty, Skyway West*

Answer: This sounds like it relates to business schools or Faculties like the Sauder School in Vancouver. It is a more complex question and varies widely among universities, their respective areas of specialization, their funding levels, and their interest in providing such a service to businesses. First ask other businesses for their opinions about the business schools in several different universities regardless of where they're located. Ask other business specifically which schools seem to have an interest, history and solid record of interfacing with business when it comes to market development, market intelligence, and creative intelligence – whatever the current terminology may be at any given moment. You will find that some business schools have specific

units that focus on such relationships and involve their faculty and top graduate students. There may be fees involved but this too depends on how the business school is funded. And you will find that some schools have a more robust funding base than others. Basically, you have to do some research to get the connection that best fits your organization.

Question: Today most of us understand how colleges, universities and technical institutions fit into the development of the larger connected communities (cities like Vancouver). How can one achieve similar results in outlying communities such as Maple Ridge? *Claus Andrup, Andrup Corp Consultants Inc*

Answer: I would begin by saying that Vancouver may not be as connected with these institutions as you think albeit there are some excellent connections. This is a comparative statement on my part as it varies from place to place. As I pointed out during the Panel discussion, the reality of civic engagement among universities is much more significant in the US, the UK and some areas in the EU. However, there is good news in the south Fraser Valley and for communities like Maple Ridge. There are 4 universities in the south Fraser Valley region! And the Golden Ears Bridge has changed the transportation pattern thereby providing residents and businesses of the entire region much improved access to these universities. Kwantlen Polytechnic University, for example, is in deep discussions with the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows School District 42 about a much more advanced level of relationships for the secondary schools, students/families, and adults looking to pursue more postsecondary education or complete degrees. The City is also in discussions with Kwantlen as well as the other universities in the region. I would suggest that now is the time to take full advantage of these new opportunities given their relationship to economic development and the provision of a competent, sustainable and competitive labour force.

Question: Colleges and universities are quite independent of their surrounding communities and have trouble dealing with community volunteers. Please comment on how the community could encourage their involvement in community projects. *Joe Gustafson, Olds Institute for Community & Regional Development*

Answer: Having spent much time around colleges and universities in Canada, the US and internationally I can agree and disagree with this observation. Some institutions are insular, to the detriment of the society that supports them whether they are private or public in nature. Conversely, there are universities that are very involved in their communities and have contributed tremendously to the betterment of their communities. The community college, for example, is a US institutional model that was designed to support regional economic development and serve regional labour markets. The majority of these colleges have done this very well over many decades. As for universities, I think of the connections that I've observed at institutions like UBC, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Guelph, Western Ontario, and Dalhousie to name but a few. In BC, the institutions that began as colleges, became university colleges, and have now emerged as teaching universities can certainly claim to have strong community connections if not long term alliances that have been of substantial local and regional value. Looking further afield, it is interesting to note that half the Ivy League universities were established by various religious congregations with one principal mission being the betterment of their communities. One of those universities, Rutgers, was at the centre of the urban re-development of New Brunswick, New Jersey which, prior to that point in its history, was truly a city in crisis. Similarly, the University of

Pennsylvania was a key factor in the renewal of west and north Philadelphia. As in many fields, it can be a risky proposition to make overly broad generalizations.

Question: What do Universities consider when choosing a location? *Stacey Crawford, District of Mission*

Answer: This is an excellent question. Why is UBC at 'land's end' and why is the main campus of SFU on the top of a mountain while the University of Toronto is in the very heart of metropolitan Toronto with its own TTC subway stop. Governments make these decisions and often they are based on complex political considerations. An appreciation of the 'economic multiplier effect' of having a university in one's community may help in understanding the politics and lobbying associated with the decision-making process and the competition among communities to have such a resource. For example, a university with an annual operating budget of \$100 million has an economic impact on its community of between \$250 and \$300 million. In addition, they create significant upward pressure on real estate values and serve as a magnet for business to locate near them. Beyond this, one has to look at the circumstances around each university. By the way, the Provinces aren't creating many new universities these days.

Question: I feel we are extremely fortunate to be in a location where we have universities, colleges and technical institutions within a 60 km radius from our homes. Is this being marketed to newcomers or existing residents? *Cheryll Heroux, Service BC*

Answer: We are very fortunate, particularly that we now have 4 universities in the south Fraser Valley region. I believe that municipalities realize that in terms of economic development and diversification and for attracting the most desirable businesses to the region universities are a terrific selling point. For most businesses today they are looking for what is often referred to as 'human capital' or 'intellectual assets', in other words, a competent, sustainable and competitive labour force. And this is what universities produce on a global scale. This is also why there is now a premium on university – community alliances because it's happening in every country and region and city with whom we must compete in the marketplace. We need to make the most of these valuable resources.

Question: How can we forge stronger links between the business and academic communities to help strengthen the local/regional economy? *Maureen Kirkbride, Telus*

Answer: I think that the University of Manitoba offers an example of one way to establish such linkages. The University of Manitoba Act establishes and provides specific powers to the University and Community Council with the idea that the Council will establish a principal link for the entire University and external communities from which can grow more specific linkages throughout the institution whether they be in medicine, engineering, agriculture or a variety of other fields of education and research. There are many models from which to select and these can be found on university websites, and within organizations like CEO's for Cities, a body that works closely with a number of universities in the US to renew and improve city environments. Similarly, the UK offers some effective models in cities like Sheffield and Manchester. Any of these models can be contextualized to fit our unique features and needs.

Question: Can universities be network hubs in a connected community? *Michael Hrybyk, BCNET*

Answer: A university can serve as a “network hub” for a community providing it has the resources, the will, the ability, and most important, the ongoing support of the network. One of the most valuable assets a university brings to such a role is neutral ground where inquiry and debate can occur with all sides being heard without the sanctioning of unpopular ideas and without various forms of advocacy that may have nothing to do with the central interests or strategic directions of the network and/or network members. Returning to the example given to Maureen, around 1997 Sheffield Hallam University hosted the Open University Network through its continuing education offices. This network had some 500 corporate members in the Midlands and south Yorkshire that focused on industry-based training, the accreditation of curriculum and industry trainers, and the awarding of credentials for training and education experiences completed in industry. A lot of things are possible.

Question: How do you determine trends on where to train future leaders? It seems that the Academic world is reacting rather than anticipating the need for future experts. *Reggie Lang, WestJet Airlines*

Answer: The search for leadership talent has been going on for centuries. The challenge to find it or to develop it was expressed many centuries ago by a military general officer in the Chinese work titled, The Art of War. I believe a lot of organizations, not just universities, are reacting rather than being proactive in the development of future leaders. This is especially true at this time when countries and organizations around the globe are going to the market place to find replacement personnel, including leaders. I would suggest that this may be a very good place to begin the forging of university alliances in this region between business, universities, government at various levels, NGO's, and so on. I would include the K to 12 systems (public & private) as the development of leadership is best begun at an early age where the characteristics of leadership can first be observed emerging.

Question: Why is that I never heard any advertisement or existence of Maple Ridge College? *Sam Seo, Manseo Ventures Inc.*

Answer: Very simple. A “Maple Ridge College” does not exist. At one time Douglas College co-habitated the Thomas Haney Centre with School District 42, however, this model of community education did not appear to fit at that time and the College's operation was closed several years ago. The fact that a lot of students who pursued a postsecondary education chose to attend institutions like SFU Burnaby, UBC, BCIT, and the David Lam Campus of Douglas College further detracted from any success the Thomas Haney operation might have hoped to achieve in the early years. The good news, as has been emphasized, is that there are now 4 universities in the south Fraser Valley region and the new Golden Ears Bridge enhances access very significantly.

While Maple Ridge College does not exist, Maple Ridge is home to Ridge Meadows College. **Stewart Sonne, Director of Instruction - Secondary and Adult Education, SD #42** adds the following comment: “Ridge Meadows College has a limited number of offerings. While these are beneficial to many, the opportunities afforded at larger institutions are of benefit to our graduating students.”

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John McKendry, Kwantlen Polytechnic University