December 21, 2015

Dear President Turpin:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the *Institutional Strategic Plan Discussion Paper* (October 2015) that is providing the basis for the new institutional strategic plan. On behalf of the **Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP)**, I would like to submit some ideas in response to the Community Engagement questions on page 25 of the *Discussion Paper*.

1. **How and for what purpose are we engaging with communities? How do we ensure our community engagement is mutual, sustained, relevant, and meaningful?**

More than ever, there is a need for a coordinated approach to facilitate knowledge generation and mobilization ventures in order to tackle complex, “real-life” issues. These collaborations are essential for creating a dynamic context for discovery about the development of children, youth, and families that will lead to new knowledge, new methods, and improved practices and policies. CUP is a 15-year old umbrella organization formed to promote reciprocal, sustained, and mutually beneficial interactions among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in research, education, and knowledge mobilization. CUP is hosted by the Faculty of Extension and includes 4.0 academics, three postdoctoral fellows, and numerous staff and students. CUP’s work is guided by a Steering Committee consisting of community members and academics. We have successfully acquired over $23 million in grants in areas such as early childhood programs, evaluation and measurement, families living with poverty, women and children’s health, and aboriginal and newcomer well-being. Our activities include consulting, brokering relationships, facilitating dialogues, and developing and managing research and knowledge mobilization projects.

It is tremendously challenging for academics to undertake this work: One must address methods and measurements within a community context, foster collaborations on and off campus, and develop knowledge mobilization strategies that support project progress and meaningful impacts. In addition, the scholarship of these activities is in demand as we study the mechanisms that support community engagement. Faculty of Extension scholars are eager to share their scholarship and are building opportunities for the University of Alberta to showcase our leadership (e.g., Masters of Arts in Community Engagement).
2. How can we promote and encourage community engagement in research and teaching? What incentives and rewards are needed?

Teaching, research, and service in community engagement are iterative, sometimes nontraditional, and often seamless. For example, I might be asked to explain the boundaries on a set of analyses (learning) at a community meeting with policymakers and community leaders (service) within our larger research project (research). The amount of each element might also fluctuate depending on type of project or phase within a project. What can the University do to better enable community engagement?

- Think big. Adopt community engagement as a core value at the institutional level and require students to have experiences in the community. There are many models of how this may work (e.g., Science Shops in Europe, a portal or “store-front” for engagement downtown) that balance community, student, and academy interests.
- Ask community stakeholders, government partners, and funders how best we can meet their needs. CUP would be delighted to bring together our partners for a discussion.
- Recognize (through Faculty Evaluation Committee reviews and expected workload) that community engagement work spans research, teaching, and service. For example, acknowledge that nontraditional or community teaching (scientific literacy) “counts” as teaching.
- Create a pool of funding that enables and/or leverages timely responses to community and government pressures. For example, CUP has been asked to find ways to support our community stakeholders as they prepare for the Syrian refugee influx. Depending on capacity, the scope may include activities such as an examination of “best” (i.e., evidence-based) practices and co-hosting a research symposium for stakeholders.