

Summary of Americas Session

Date: December 8th, 2018

Name of Facilitator: Dr. Kimberley Smith

Name of Rapporteur: Ms. Nicole Kennard

Attendees: RCE Atlanta (Ms. Nicole Kennard, Ms. Brittany Foutz), RCE Portland (Dr. Kimberley Smith, Ms. Serena Dressel, Mr. Joseph Culhane), RCE Borderlands Mexico-United States (Prof. Carolina López), Dr. Charles Hopkins (RCE Americas Advisor)

Throughout this discussion, we continued talking about some of the topics mentioned in the last RCE Americas regional meeting in Posadas, Argentina (7th RCE Meeting of the Americas, 25-27 October 2018), specifically concerning community engagement and inclusivity and about starting a regional RCE Youth Network.

In speaking about **community inclusivity** we discussed how RCEs need to engage with communities to understand the main sustainability issues that are being faced and how RCEs can be used as a resource for communities. We understand that RCEs should be utilised for **bottom-up, co-creative projects** between higher education and other community groups, rather than the more traditional knowledge transfer or top-down engagement approaches common in academic settings. We also discussed the need to bring more voices, especially from different backgrounds and different sectors, to the table. In terms of finding ways to increase community engagement and inclusivity, one idea that came to light was having RCEs help specific communities or neighbourhoods fund, plan, and hold celebratory events that would share their culture and experiences with other groups throughout the city and surrounding areas. These events could also be used to bring in industry partners and potential funders and to help promote local goods and cottage industries in these communities. In addition, RCE Borderlands Mexico-United States presented an interesting model they are using to connect with different communities in their region, by setting up mobile living labs to interact with the community. These mobile living labs work with the community to identify challenges toward sustainable development and work together to develop solutions to these issues on the ground.

In discussing the need for increased community inclusivity in the RCEs, the issue of **affordability** arose. We saw a need for RCEs to help in tackling social issues, especially by helping those living in underserved communities meet basic living needs. This issue is particularly emphasized in RCE Borderlands, where many sustainable development projects are focused on building local economies and helping grow cottage industries. We saw a need for other RCEs in the Americas, particularly those with more funding and in more affluent regions, to support other RCEs struggling to help their communities meet basic living needs. RCEs can support each other through **collaborative research, collaborative grant writing**, and perhaps even having RCEs with more available funding **sponsor** youth or representatives from other RCEs to attend conferences and share their experiences.

We also discussed how we could **increase communication** between the different RCEs in the Americas, especially between those in North and Central / South America, as this becomes more difficult with the language barrier. This discussion specifically focused on increasing communication via the creation of a regional RCE Youth Network, which has already been done in other regions (such as for RCEs in Africa). Specifically, we made an action item to have 2-3 point people (preferably bilingual) from North, Central, and South America to run the regional Youth Network and connect the RCEs. We also discussed connecting the youth network through an annual virtual conference (which RCE Grand Rapids is planning this year), but we learned that in some areas (i.e., RCE Borderlands) it may be difficult for some students to attend due to poor internet connection and lack of computer access. Therefore, we discussed alternative platforms for

communication, and decided that creating a communication platform that can be used on mobile phones would be the most accessible for youth in all RCEs. Therefore, we have another action point to create a mobile phone based communication platform (such as a WhatsApp group) for the regional RCE Youth Network. We also believe face-to-face communication of youth in the RCEs is vital for the development of future sustainable development projects, and discussed ways that this could be achieved. One idea was to develop a regional “alternative spring break” program, where youth from different RCEs would travel together to perform a service project in one location over their spring break periods.

In summary, the **main discussion / action points** from the 11th Global RCE Conference Americas Breakout Session are the following:

- Continue to find ways to increase community engagement and inclusivity, with a focus on co-creation and co-ownership of sustainable development projects between higher education and community groups
- Increase collaboration between RCEs in the region through collaborative research projects and grant writing
- Find ways to connect the Youth Network across the Americas and find youth representatives to take ownership of managing the network