McMaster Research Shop:
Information for prospective community partners

1. What's the Research Shop?

The McMaster Research Shop is a co-curricular (not for credit) volunteer program where graduate and upper-year undergraduate students work on research projects in partnership with a community organization. We work with non-profit and community groups to provide plain-language answers to their research questions. We've been around since 2016 and have been working under the Office of Community Engagement since 2017.

2. What can I expect from the Research Shop?

We offer volunteer research teams of enthusiastic and bright students and alumni with access to academic literature databases, methods training, and community-based research supervision and support. Over the course of an academic semester (3-4 months), a team will work on a project that answers your research question. A Research Shop project typically leads to a plain-language report (10-20 pages) and may include:

- A review of academic publications and/or other online material;
- A scan of existing practices and initiatives;
- Results from surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with identified service users, stakeholders, or experts;
- Recommendations based on evidence;
- Material to help you communicate your findings (e.g., infographics, pamphlets).

Research Shop projects are intended provide you with the evidence you need to help you and your organization make better decisions, improve your programming, apply for funding, support advocacy, and/or raise awareness of an issue.

3. Who will work on my project?

Our staff members recruit, train, and supervise volunteers from all faculties and let them rank their preferences of the projects they want to work on, leading to diverse interdisciplinary teams. This means an engineering student might work on a project interviewing food bank users about their food preferences, or a social science student might work with ecologists to evaluate habitat data. In this model, students can develop and apply their research skills in a unique subject area, bringing a fresh perspective to a new topic or issue. While most of our partners are satisfied by the quality of information our volunteers provide, it's important to note that *we cannot guarantee teams of subject matter experts* to work on your project. If you have more subject-specific research needs, we can help navigate your request elsewhere in the university (such as a partnership with a course or faculty member).

4. What qualifies as a Research Shop project?

Each semester we take on projects with diverse subject areas from a variety of community organizations. To get an idea of projects we've taken on in the past, have a look at our collection of reports on MacSphere.

While we try to take on as many requests as we can, not all projects are a good fit for our model. The table on the next page outlines our criteria for selecting projects.

Note: if you have a project idea but aren't sure if it will qualify, please connect with us to schedule a conversation and we can assist you. Lots of projects don't initially fulfill all our criteria, but in many cases a conversation or two will help us come up with something doable together! Email us at: rshop@mcmaster.ca

Project Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Community Benefit	The research stands to benefit the broader community and be put to concrete, practical use (e.g. used to inform strategic planning, grant applications, partnerships, policy). The community partner is located in the Hamilton community. The project has been conceived in a respectful, ethical way. Other relevant community partners are on board with the project (e.g., does not compete with work that others are doing).	The research is unlikely to be put to practical use. The research request is coming from an individual member of the public and stands to benefit them individually but will not likely have larger benefit. The community partner does not have the resources/capacity to implement or use findings (e.g. the group is new and does not have a structure of decision-making). The community partner is not local and will not likely benefit those in Hamilton. The research may be unethical or would put the Research Shop at risk in terms of broader community relations. Other relevant stakeholders needed to implement the findings are not in support of this project (e.g. one anti-poverty group wants to do research into X, while the other anti-poverty groups think this is a bad idea, are already doing the work, or don't know about the project).
Research Would Otherwise Not Occur	Project is submitted by a non-profit, community group, social enterprise, or other group that serves the community and does not have the financial resources to carry out the research.	Project is submitted by a commercial business or other large institution that has researchers on staff who would have the expertise, resources, and time to complete the project or could afford to hire someone themselves. (In some cases, the Research Shop may be able to assist such groups if they are able and willing to support a paid Team Lead position.)
Support from Organization/ Partners	Community partner(s) will commit to helping scope the project, orienting volunteers, providing access to data (e.g., interview participants), reviewing draft deliverables, and providing direction when needed.	Requesting partner is unable to provide basic support to complete the project. Not all stakeholders are on board (e.g. a staff is requesting we complete a project without their manager's approval; one organization wants us to complete a project that implicates other members of a committee without their involvement).

	All relevant stakeholders in the organization support the project.	
Shop Capacity	The research can feasibly be completed by a team of volunteers (at 5 hrs/week each) over the course of an academic semester. There's a team lead for the project. The Research Shop has fewer than 5 or 6 projects for the semester.).	The Research Shop does not have the capacity to take on the project (e.g. cannot meet the needed deadline; cannot find a team lead for the project; project requires specific disciplinary expertise that is not currently available). The Research Shop has 5-6 confirmed projects for the semester. In this case, it may be feasible to take on the project in another semester.
Broadening the OCE's Impact/ Relations with a Wider Community	The partner is new to the Research Shop, facilitating a new connection. OR – the Research Shop has worked with the partner before but completing another project with further the relationship, potentially leading to other unique opportunities in the future.	The Research Shop has worked with the partner before/ recently and does not have the capacity to take on another project with them at this time The Research Shop would be supporting long-term/ ongoing relationships to the detriment of connecting with newer groups
Positive Volunteer Experience	The question and research activities are interesting, and volunteers stand to gain important skills/experience from participating in the project (e.g. exposes them to new fields, data sets, and methods; there are primary research opportunities such as interviews and/or focus groups).	The research project is unlikely to offer students significant experiential learning, skill development, or career growth related to research or community-engagement. No substantive "research" component (e.g. literature review, interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.) and/or opportunity for analysis/interpretation.

5. What is a typical project life cycle?

We do our best to complete projects over the course of one semester (3-4 months) starting in January, May, and September each year. Projects typically have five stages, each with different kinds of community partner involvement:

1 – Intake. You submit (or have already submitted) a research request through our website providing us with details about the proposed project. Alternatively, you contact (or have already contacted) us to set up a meeting to go over the details in-person or over the phone.

2 – Scoping. We meet with you to refine the research question and see if the project and our model fit well together.

3 – Recruitment. If selected, at the beginning of the semester (i.e., January, May, or September) we try to recruit a team for your project.

4 – Implementation. We supervise your team as they carry out the research. We'll ask that you meet with the team once at the beginning of the semester and halfway through the project to help orient the volunteers and monitor progress. In between, you'll communicate with the team as needed to help them with their research.

5 – Deliverable. We'll create a 10-20 page plain-language report and/or other deliverable for you that answers your research question.

6. What next?

Check out examples of past research project reports on MacSphere. Then, if you haven't already done so, submit your research request through our website, or get in contact with us (rshop@mcmaster.ca) to set up a time to chat about your project idea.

Are you having trouble coming up with a research question for your problem? We can help you – simply get in touch. In case you like to learn to do things on your own, check out this helpful resource on developing a strong research question: https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-questions/