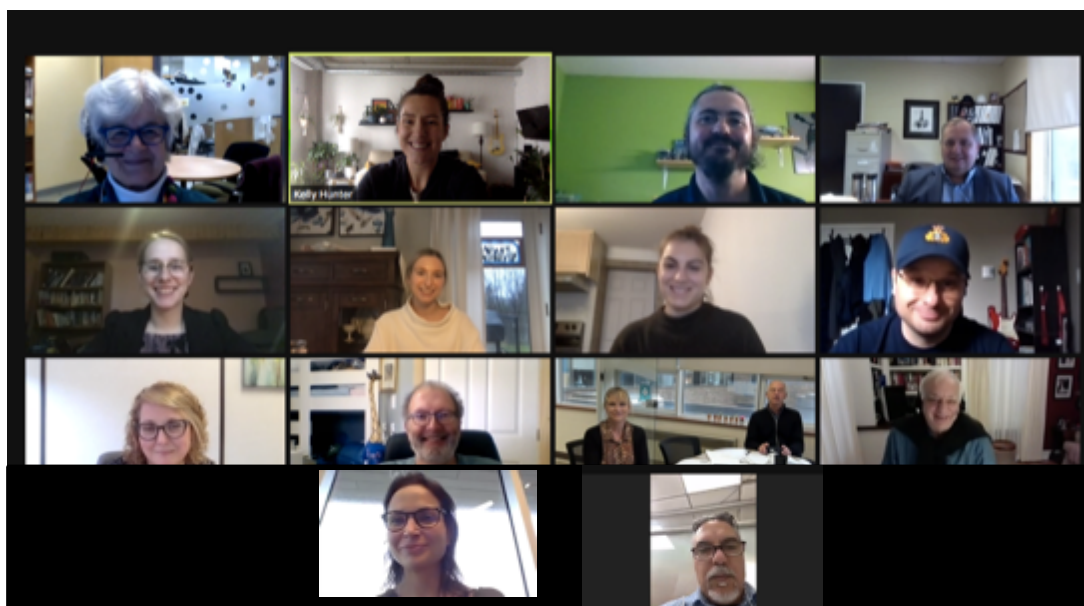




**Final Report:
MicroResearch NL Virtual Workshop
Halifax, Nova Scotia
November 8-19, 2021**



Participants, judges, facilitators, and guests on the final day of the workshop

Building capacity for community focused health research



Introduction and Background

MicroResearch is an innovative research training program for community members that began in 2008 in Africa under the leadership of Noni MacDonald and Bob Bortolussi of IWK Health in Halifax, NS. Since 2016, the African MicroResearch program has been implemented in communities in Nova Scotia.

Expansion of MicroResearch NS to Newfoundland and Labrador

While Nova Scotia rates poorly on many health indicators compared to other wealthier provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador has similar poor ratings. Furthermore, health care funding is becoming increasingly limited in both provinces. The gaps in knowledge translation, adaptation, and implementation at the community level are widening and there is a need to better align local resources to improve outcomes within the community. Strategies and collaboration to address complex health problems need to be community-focused, locally driven, sustainable, culturally and local resource appropriate solutions. Building on this need, MicroResearch NS (MR NS) reached out to Memorial University in Newfoundland, specifically to Dr. Rosemary Ricardelli and Dr. Heather Carnahan, from the Marine Institute, to grow MicroResearch in Newfoundland (MR NL). MR NL aims to develop local community focused research capacity to find solutions to local health problems deemed important by local participants.

“The goal of MicroResearch is to improve health care outcomes with innovative community based research that assures quality and integration of research into the fabric of the local health system and the community”

MicroResearch Program Model

The fundamentals of the MR NS program are included in the MR NL program:

Workshops:

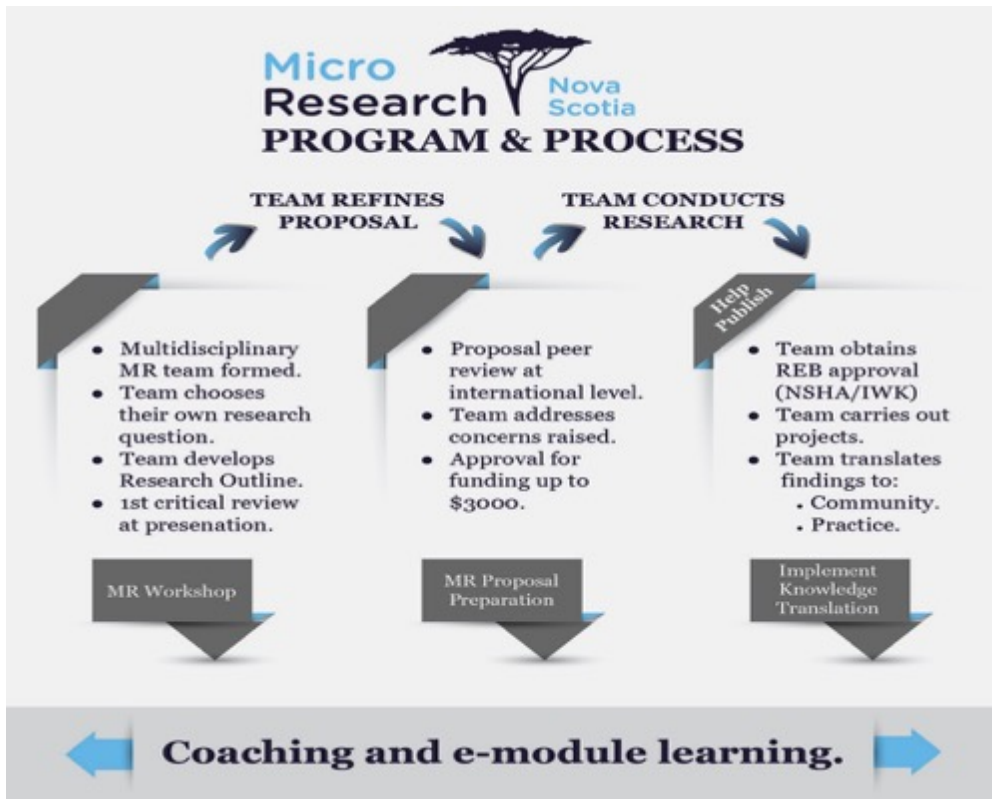
- Training – participants are taught practical and applied community focused research skills over 10 half-days

Proposal Preparation:

- Interdisciplinary collaboration - teams work together to move a research idea to a fundable proposal
- Seed funding - of up to \$3,000 to support quality projects

Implementation:

- Project management – teams work together to carry out the community project
- Knowledge sharing – of research outcomes with stakeholders



See MacDonald et al MicroResearch: Finding sustainable local health solutions in East Africa through small local research studies. *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health* 2014;4:185–93

Virtual MR NS Workshop Format

COVID pressures lead to the pivot of MiroResearch International from in-person, on-site workshops to going virtual with great success. This was followed by MR NS with a virtual workshop held in September 2021 for a team in Halifax. Hence the opportunity to expand to MR NL was less complex as the program could be carried out virtually instead of in-person.

MicroResearch NS Program Accreditation

The MR NS virtual workshop has received accreditation from Dalhousie University Continuing Professional Development, Faculty of Medicine for 40 Category 1 RCPS / CCFM credits. Continuing Professional Development credits can also be garnered by other health professional participants for their continuing education. As of 2021, the accreditation does not cover MDs from outside Nova Scotia.

MicroResearch NL November Virtual Workshop

Workshop Facilitators and Coaches

All faculty who facilitated this workshop had research experience and most had MicroResearch teaching experience.

The two coaches were both familiar with MicroResearch.

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Participants: Building on past experience with recruitment, workshop participants were recruited by Drs. Ricciardelli and Carnahan through personal emails, referrals, and invitations to those at the Marine Institute and Memorial University (MUN).

Eight participants were due to attend, but one had to withdraw due to time conflict. The final participant count was seven. Of note, five were graduate students at the Marine Institute, one was also from the Coast Guard, one grad student was a ship captain working on a contract in Dubai, and two others from MUN with backgrounds in research. It is noteworthy that the virtual format allowed this disparate group in terms of time and place to work together, i.e. MR NS on AST, MR NL on NST and the participant in Dubai 7 hours ahead of AST.

Pre-Workshop Assessment

Seven of the seven participants filled in the pre-workshop evaluation virtually.

The most common reasons participants gave for attending the workshop were: having been asked by a research supervisor; to improve research skills; to become involved in a research project; and/or to meet new people involved in research. All respondents have had previous research experience, with many of them currently enrolled in a graduate program.

Workshop Logistics

All the workshop sessions were held virtually via Zoom with the opportunity following each lecture session for questions and comments either virtually or via the chat function. Each of the sessions were recorded and posted as an unlisted YouTube video by MR NS Coordinator, Kelly Hunter. The group-work portion of each session was also held via Zoom.

Participants were given access to all the workshop materials, including PowerPoint presentations, supplementary documents, and research toolkits ahead of the workshop via Google Drive. During in-person workshops, these resources are typically shared through USB drives.

Workshop Format

The MR NS workshops combined interactive seminars, exercises and daily small group interdisciplinary, project development sessions supported by local site coaches. Participants were placed into one group on Day 2 with good spread of background and expertise. One group was chosen as there were only seven participants.

The daily attendance was very good with 6 out of 7 or 7 out of 7 daily with only 3 missing one day each due to a conflict. These participants reviewed the YouTube lecture prior to the next day's session. The group rapidly became a team with excellent daily discourse and regular sharing by email and catchup conversations for those who had to miss a class due to conflicting commitments.

Workshop Program Overview:

The usual 10 half-day program was compressed into 9 half-days due to the holiday on November 11th. The program included daily lectures, discussions, exercises, and group work. Note the lectures for usual Day 4 were split and added to Day 3 and Day 5. Having the half-day sessions start at noon (12:30pm in NL) and run until 4:00pm (4:30pm in NL) worked very well. The virtual program included short breaks in between to limit fatigue.

On Day 2, each participant vigorously discussed the merits of their individual research topic. One area was selected, shaped into a question, and then refined for proposal overview development throughout the workshop. All questions expressed deep commitment to helping to make a difference in the health of this community. Several of the questions were related to a similar topic area- mental health amongst mariners.

On Day 3, a team spokesperson presented the list of topics to the coaches and facilitators and the team discussed why the final selection was made in terms of how well it fit the FINER criteria.

Research Questions:

Team: "Are there barriers felt by the Mariner Community when they reach out to Mental Health Services?"

The rest of the workshop was devoted to refining their research questions and developing the proposal overviews including background, methods, budget, knowledge translation, and next steps etc. all with the help of the two MR coaches. Other presentations focused on report writing, manuscript development, creating posters and abstracts, as well as how to present their research for the final day.

Final Day: Team Research Proposal Overview Presentation and Judging

The refined research aims/question presented by the team on the last day of the workshop for adjudication was:

Refined Question: What are commercial fish harvesters' experiences accessing mental wellness supports in Newfoundland Labrador?

The highlight on the final day of the workshop was the oral presentation describing the team's proposal overview to answer their research question. The presentations included a 10-minute overview of the team's research proposal followed by comments and questions from the judges and audience and then constructive suggestions from the other final day attendees on how the proposal might be strengthened.

Judges

Three distinguished judges were invited to adjudicate the presentations.

- Dr. Angie Clarke, Acting Associate Vice President Academic and Student Affairs, Marine Institute, Memorial University
- Dr. David Miller, Director of Research, Grant and Contract Services, Memorial University
- Captain Fred Anstey, Master Mariner and Head of the School of Maritime Studies, Marine Institute, Memorial University

The judges listened to the presentation, asked questions, and deliberated on whether the project could go forward to be developed into a full MR-NS grant proposal. Their evaluation and scoring system was based on MR principles.

Judges' Comments

The judges were very impressed by the importance of the research question to the fishing community in Newfoundland and Labrador and were all eager to help the team move forward. They also noted that they hoped this would be the beginning of more work in the area given the timeliness of the topic. The proposal was considered novel, compelling and delivered with great passion. Also evident was the personal involvement of all members of the team, each person had a role to play and answered questions about the project.

The team was given the green light to go ahead for full proposal development. The judges then offered specific constructive criticisms to both teams post adjudication for strengthening the proposals. The judges also encouraged the team to springboard this project into a larger study within this topic.

Workshop Assessment

An assessment of the workshop by participants was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted anonymously. All seven participants completed the final participant evaluation form. The workshop was well received and highly valued, particularly the emphasis on group work and the simplicity of the lectures. Access to the online supporting materials and the expert coaches were particularly appreciated. A few participants suggested that the time commitment and the expectations involved in conducting the project post-workshop be more clear ahead of time.

Team Evaluation

From the viewpoint of the coaches and facilitator the group worked well together. In the team evaluation, which all seven participants completed, respondents indicated how collaboratively they worked and how they appreciated working in a diverse. Potential issues that may need to be addressed going forward include the likelihood of managing busy schedules and competing commitments among the team.

Outcomes and Recommendations

Administrative Considerations:

1. This virtual MR NL workshop worked well with half-days starting at 12:30pm (NST). Five minute breaks were given between lectures and the team work was done with the coaches on Zoom each day once the lectures were over. The evaluation noted morning sessions might have been even better instead of the afternoon. Holding three lectures on Day 3 and Day 5 to cope with Remembrance Day was a bit heavy but was accepted by participants. The format, because the class size was limited, meant participants were actively engaged and asked questions throughout the sessions and discussions did ensue.
2. High level discussion is needed to further consider the potential of the virtual format. One of the team members was in Dubai and was able to fully participate. However, the virtual format does require each participant to have a computer and good internet access. Having breakout groups during the group work component might also help as they work on the various parts of their proposals.
3. The optimal size for an online virtual team where participants do not know each other is still unclear, but this seven-member team worked very well. The seven participants with two coaches with different research strengths seemed ideal. Having the team introduce themselves to each other on Day 2 putting forward their skill sets rather than just their discipline was very helpful.

Educational Considerations:

1. Follow up to see if storing educational materials via Google Drive is adequate and review if an improved website with hyperlinks will decrease the need for USBs. Review the organization of the materials on both the Google Drive and the USBs for ease of accessibility.
2. Revise budget lecture (Day 6) to include a note that the team must know and follow due processes for how funds are handled at their institution. This was brought up in the budget discussion and is a very important addition.
3. In report writing (Day 8), add in NGO on slide 5 to include a discussion on what NGOs might be looking for in a report.
4. Determine if an interim evaluation on Day 5 regarding the virtual format might be helpful, especially if there are two teams.
5. The two coaches might consider a follow-up half-hour discussion on time management as an after workshop meeting given the interest from team members on the topic.
6. There is even more need for a MR NS/NL Forum as this team's topic has potential connections to other projects. This will require specific funding and planning.
7. The recording and posting of the lectures on YouTube as private videos has worked very well when a team member had to catch up after missing a session due to a conflict. As well, one participant noted that they would review these in future as needed as they are a good resource. When the MR website is redeveloped these videos should be included.
8. Need to expand the reviewer data base to include individuals from a fishers/marine background, both from Newfoundland and Labrador and elsewhere.
9. Review and rethink deadlines for grant application submissions especially if holding multiple workshops throughout the year.

Acknowledgements:

The MicroResearch NS team would like to express our gratitude:

To the seven participants for their time, energy and the passion they put into the development of their proposal overview and for doing this using a virtual format.

To Heather Carnahan and Rosemary Ricciardelli for their excellent coaching and recruitment of participants and judges.

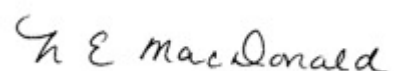
To Research Services at IWK and NSH, Dalhousie University Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University Research and Innovation, and Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation for supporting MR NS and to the Marine Institute and MUN for supporting MR NL.

To the Marine Institute and Memorial University for their commitment to funding the team if they are successful with their full MR proposal application.

To Kelly Hunter for her superb support for the infrastructure for this workshop.

To the judges and guest teachers for giving so generously of their time and talents.

Respectfully submitted by

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N E MacDonald".

Noni E. MacDonald
MD, MSc, FRCPC, FCAHS