# GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS CONSIDERING RESEARCH PROJECTS

6 TOPICS TO DISCUSS IN-DEPTH WHEN APPROACHED ABOUT A RESEARCH PROJECT

This series of considerations created by the Arizona Prevention Research Center's Community Action Board is intended for community organizations trying to decide if they want to conduct/host a research project, and how to communicate with an academic partner who is seeking a partnership to conduct their research. The goal is to help identify the priorities, needs, commitment, and collaborative efforts of both parties.
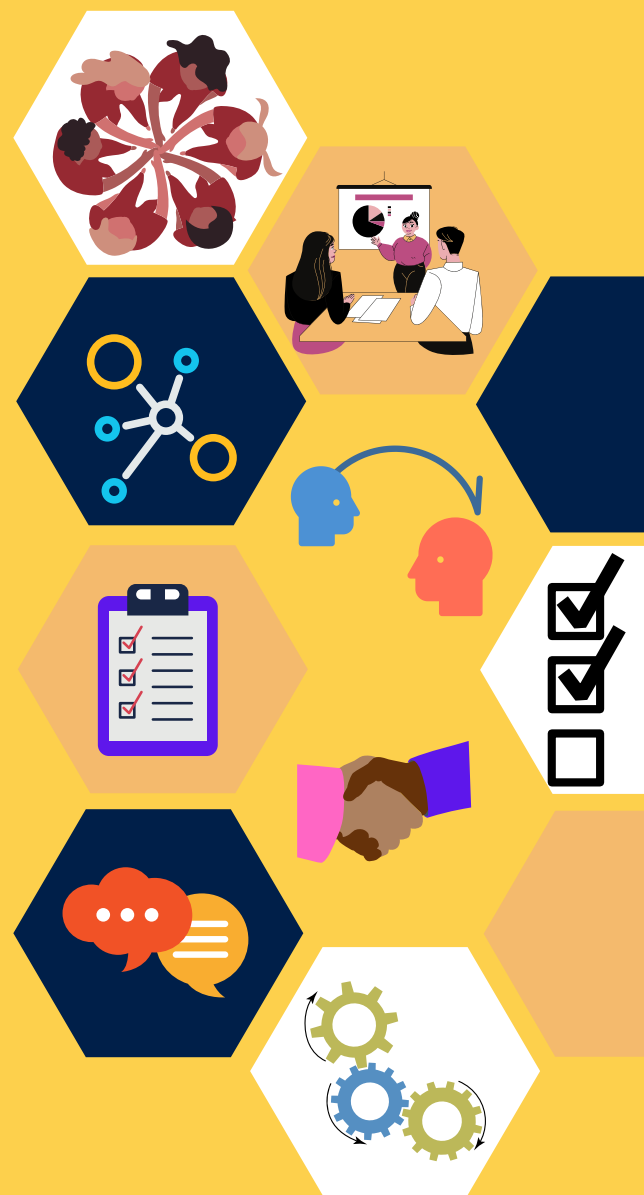
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Has a researcher recently approached you about a research partnership? Researchers often look to community organizations to connect them to their networks and to represent community insights. Equitable research partnerships however, require considerable dialogue and planning to meet everyone's expectations and needs. How will you decide if this is a research partnership you want to pursue? As The Arizona Prevention Research Center's Community Action Board with a long history of community-academic partnership, we offer the following topics for you to consider.

1. The Research question(s)

When you meet with the researcher, a great way to start is to find out the type of questions they hope to ask and/or answer. Is your organization interested in the same questions? If so, could this research study help the mission of your organization? Researchers should be early enough in their process that they are able to adapt research questions to the needs and interests of both parties. Research questions will change with your input and expertise. Some research projects aim to understand aspects or unique factors of your community, others are interested in evaluating a specific intervention, and some projects even yield evidence that can be used for policy changes that will benefit your community. Understanding what the researcher is hoping to study, and what it means for your organization will help you consider whether the research is right for you.

2. Research approaches and methods

Ask the researcher to tell you about their research approach. We recommend that you work with researchers who are experienced or interested in community-based participatory research in which there is an equitable partnership between the academic and community partner in all aspects of the research. A major advantage of CBPR is that it focuses on community benefit. However there may be reasons for you to engage in more traditional investigator-driven research that already has a specific methodology. The investigator-driven model usually involves the researcher determining the subject of investigation and how they will decide to conduct the study. In cases such as this, your organization's role may be minimal, and might only require granting the researchers access to the organization and its constituents/participants for research purposes. Community-based participatory research involves community members working in unison with researchers on every aspect of the project. This includes goal setting, developing the research questions, collecting and analyzing data, and disseminating findings This type of research enables organizations to give their communities a voice. Whether the research is traditional or participatory, your role is to ensure that the research is performed in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner. Comfort with the research methods and level of involvement being ask of you is crucial in understanding what kind of research your organization is willing to be a part of. Remember to also ask yourself whether your organization's needs and resources are in line with those of the research project.

3. The research decision making process

When a research project is being initiated, its important to understand what and who is involved in the decision-making process. This includes not only determining the research question and methods, but also how the funding is being distributed, who owns the data and the findings, how the findings will be shared and how they will be used. An upfront conversation with the researcher about who and how these decisions will be made is important in making your decision. This dialogue will usually lead to deeper conversations and perhaps the decision to enter into a formal agreement. Frank and respectful conversations ensure all parties are comfortable and a general consensus is reached and understood.

4. Resources required for the research

In entering into an agreement with a researcher, it is important to understand what is being asked of your organization, your staff and your community members. Questions you might ask include: What is the timeline for your research? What are you asking of my staff and how much time will it take? What kind of resources, financial and otherwise, do you have for us to partner with you? What incentives will the research provide to participants? Answers to these questions will allow you to reflect on your organization's ability to manage its day-to-day duties while taking on the additional time it may take to conduct the study. It is also important for the researcher to hear about your time constraints, so that they have a clear understanding of what they can expect from your partnership. More traditional research projects, in particular, tend to work with very prescribed budgets and expenditures. Do not hesitate to ask the total budget for the research, how these resources are being distributed and who else they plan to partner with. If you are interested, ask about opportunities for your staff to engage in conferences or meetings related to the research. University's tend to manage the funds of large government grants, and you may want to learn more about the fund reimbursement process before you agree to collaborate.

5. The research timeline

Some research project are very short, but many others can span years. It is important to understand just how long a project is because you are committing time, potentially space and trained staff members. The specifics of a timeline can help your organization learn about the number of meetings that are anticipated throughout the entire process. Research projects undergo an application process, an human subjects ethics review, and an implementation roll out. There are often delays in the timeline that are out of the control of the researcher. As an organization, the timeline for data collection may also not be convenient for you. A conversation about all these factors can help your team and the researcher understand expectations. Make clear to the researcher that you expect timely updates about the research timeline or the project plan.

6. Data ownership and dissemination

The extent to which your organization may want to share some ownership of the data will depend on the extent to which you engage in research. If you are just providing a site for recruitment, than you will not be as invested in the findings. If your staff helps to describe the research to potential participants, or even engages in data collection, you will become increasingly invested in the research question and the results. Your organization may have hopes of utilizing the findings from the research for your own planning, or for dissemination with your constituents or at professional meetings and conferences. If you decide to move forward with a research project, we encourage you to come to agreement about your access to the data and how results will be shared with and beyond the community. For example, academic researchers are required to present their research at conferences and write articles for peer-reviewed journals. You could request that someone from your organization be included in articles related to the research or that your organization be acknowledged for your role in the research in the article. As a community partner/researcher, you should have the opportunity to review research presentations and articles before they are finalized. As you formalize your partnership, keep in mind that researchers and organizations should share the central goal of being transparent with how the data and findings will be shared. These conversations can ensure that your organization and the researcher are respectful of the communities that you serve, represent, work with and rely upon.