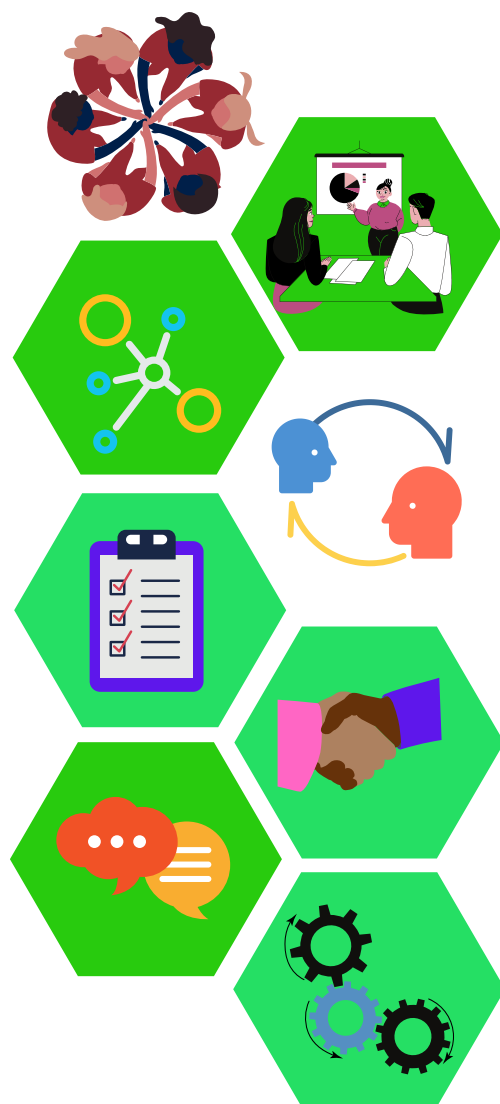


Developing a research study with community partners in mind:

considerations for researchers when approaching community partners

GETTING STARTED:

Whether you are just in the beginning phases of developing a Community-based participatory research (CBPR) partnership or you have experience in a CBPR partnership, thoughtful considerations should be given to the approach and needs of the community partners you engage. The followings considerations were created by the Arizona Prevention Research Center's (AzPRC) Community Action Board (CAB) to aid researchers and students alike when approaching potential partners they hope to develop effective partnerships with. The considerations described below were developed with both community and institutional partners in mind, and are geared towards both organizations as partners and the individuals who will represent those organizations in the partnership.



Prepared and created by the AzPRC's Community Action Board



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This guide is supported by **Cooperative Agreement Number U48DP001925** from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the Arizona Prevention Research Center and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Created in partnership with the AzPRC Community Action Board (CAB) Ad Hoc Research Vetting Committee

Positive community-research partnerships respond to a community organization's identified needs and priorities. While researchers may have a clear "ask" when they contact a community organization for help with a research project, it is important to also consider what you will be providing to the organization. As with any new relationship, first impressions are important, therefore prior to contacting an organization, critically evaluate whether your research goals/projects align with the mission of the organization and how you might help them address their organizational needs.

1. Approaching the right community partners.

Understanding the priorities and the needs of the community organizations should be the starting point of any potential partnership. Community organizations typically have the greatest insight and understanding of a local community, and their priorities can guide, alter, or adapt a potential study to better suit the needs of the populations they serve. Research partnerships often focus on communities of diverse cultural backgrounds and underrepresented populations. Working with community organizations can help researchers increase the cultural appropriateness and relevance of their project. Partnering with community organizations can help researchers understand community values and cultural norms, fostering mutually beneficial trust from a project's inception.

2. Aligning your research with the organizational mission.

A key component of any sustainable community-researcher partnership is to recognize the distinct needs of all partners. It is useful to refer to the mission and/or vision statements of a potential community organization to determine the appropriateness of your study. If goals do not align, or only partially align with the mission and vision of the community partner, it may be necessary to revisit your research project and consider how this partner or their community can benefit. Consider what kinds of resources and products might result from the research project, and how the partner can utilize these products to achieve their mission. Tangible examples of this include collecting data on a common health concern, providing medical equipment, helping design grant application templates, or creating research reports that support future work.

3. Incorporating community-based participatory research (CBPR)

Incorporating the principles of CBPR into your research approach will help ensure an equitable and mutually beneficial research project. However, it is important to recognize that CBPR is not always the best fit for a specific research project. Reflecting upon how your project fits into the continuum of community engagement from traditional research to a fully participatory approach is a useful exercise. There are many resources on CBPR to help you in this process ([link?](#)). Regardless of where your project falls on the continuum, when approaching a community organization, healthy conversation regarding the priorities and needs of the organization and the community are the foundation for any community-based effort. In building a CBPR partnership, make sure you have the time to build trust, assure confidence, and commit to the expressed needs of the community organization. A CBPR approach can further the mission of the partnering organization and empower them to aid in the decision-making process as local domain experts. If this is your approach, you may decide to create structured participatory decision-making processes, such as community advisory boards. Be mindful that a CBPR partnership is a long-term effort, and your research approach should be flexible and adaptive to community realities and needs.

4. Discussing resources.

Wherever your research project falls on the continuum of community engagement, successful communication begins with honest communication about resources. Communication should be an on-going process, particularly when it comes to human resource capacity of the partnering organization. Encourage the community organization to be honest about the resources they need to work with you and be clear about your hopes and expectations. Identify both the tangible and intangible resources that you can offer each other. Discuss the funding you bring to the effort, as well as your expectations for the organization in terms of facilitating your research. Discuss issues such as the research timeline, staff training requirements, travel opportunities and material development. Consider other resources you can offer such as staff training in your area of expertise or incentives for participants. In determining the budget, remember that you are not just paying the organization for a specific service, participant recruitment, for example, you are compensating them for their expertise and their ties to community. Ownership of data and products related to the research an essential discussion in the early stages of a relationship.

5. Clarifying support and time commitments with your partner.

Community organizations are often working with great urgency to serve the daily needs of their community. Remember that your research activities are competing with ongoing duties and responsibilities within the organization. Researchers should facilitate dialogue regarding their research timeline and level of flexibility and communicate promptly any changes in their plans. One way to show respect and mutual appreciation is to provide a post project/partnership plan, as well as a contingency plan if a project is cut short. A simple conversation can clarify how commitments can be sustained after project completion. This may involve a commitment to support intervention activities post project, ongoing access to data, or shared ownership/authorship of research products. Clarifying these commitments protects all parties and allows community benefit to be at the forefront of decision making.

6. Creating a clear and collaborative decision-making process.

Shared and equitable decision-making process between a researcher and a community organization will contribute to high quality research that has greater relevance and impact on a community level. Be intentional in including organizational members in planning meetings, where appropriate, and make sure that their perspective is included in research decisions. Consider making the organizational leader a Co-Principal Investigator and create a plan for shared decision making. Adding clarity to decision making also allows the partners to voice concerns early, but also feel valued and become further invested in the success of an ongoing project as well as future collaborations.