



Collaboration with Community-Based Organizations And Agencies: A Quick Guide for UCSF Researchers

Read the full guide at <http://ctsi.ucsf.edu/ce/resources.php#GUIDES>

1. What is community-engaged research?

Community-engaged research is research in which community input is incorporated in the development of the research question, implementation of the research project, analysis of the results and/ or dissemination of the findings to community stakeholders. Community-engaged research involves community members impacted by your research. Community engagement is an important element of the successful translation of research from bench to bedside and community.

Community-engaged research answers three basic types of questions:

- What's true for this community? (epidemiological or descriptive studies)
- Does this community-based and created program work? (creating practice-based evidence)
- Does this program or intervention work in a community setting? (creating evidence-based practice)

Examples of Community-Based Research Collaborations at UCSF

(updated periodically)

AANCART San Francisco is a collaboration to promote cancer awareness activities and cancer-related research among the 10 Asian ethnic groups in the greater San Francisco Bay Area region.

This HIV prevention study is a collaboration testing community interventions to reduce sexual risk behavior and increase testing among young Black men who have sex with men.

The ASPIRE project is a collaboration of the UCSF School of Dentistry's CAN DO Center and Head Start to determine parental acceptability and preferences for preventive dental treatments for young Hispanic children.

2. Why should I be interested in community-engaged research?

Engaging communities in research makes research more rigorous and applicable. When researchers and representatives of community organizations engage in the process of discovery *together*, advances in scientific knowledge can be more finely tuned and immediately applicable to the lives of community members. When research is community-engaged, the path from scientific discovery to practice is likely to lead to more rapid and more fully realized advances in the health of communities. Community members who are impacted by factors are usually uniquely able to identify them and likewise identify strengths and shortcomings of research interventions aimed at a health problem.

Community-engaged research challenges the traditional notion that researchers alone can and should initiate, design, and conduct studies to improve community health. Including and valuing community expertise can help researchers improve the focus and relevance of interventions, ensure that study designs are more responsive to external validity and feasibility issues, and disseminate findings more broadly with providers and policymakers who can use research results.

3. What are the steps of community-engaged research?

Involving community partners can begin in the earliest steps of the research process. Early engagement helps studies have real and immediate relevance to the community. Partners can work collaboratively to:

- Formulate a research question;
- Write and submit a grant proposal;
- Collect data;
- Deliver an intervention or program (if applicable);
- Analyze data; and
- Disseminate findings.

4. How do I gain entrée to the community I would like to engage in research?

This is one of the most common questions on the minds of researchers contemplating community-engaged research. Entrée is the critical first step of building a working relationship.

A researcher can get started with community agencies in a number of ways:

- Identify other UCSF researchers who have worked or currently are working on collaborative projects with a community partner. Ask to be introduced to individuals and groups that may be interested in developing their relationships with UCSF.
- Identify and approach UCSF clinicians working in a community and ask them introduce you to individuals connected to community agencies.
- Identify existing community planning or action groups in the area of your research interest.
- Contact the CTSI [Community Engagement Program](#) for a consultation!

5. What are the qualities and key components of research partnerships?

Because trusting and effective partnerships cannot be cultivated quickly, researchers must be willing to commit to the partnership over a long time frame. This requires *patience* in recognizing at the outset that a new study will be many months and sometimes years in development. As a result, *creativity* and *resourcefulness* are required in career planning and the prioritization of other commitments.

Among the personal qualities that help researchers work effectively in any community and with community partners, *respectfulness* and *humility* are paramount. Academic partners must recognize that their training and education provide only one piece in a complex array of skills needed to conduct effective community-based research. Respectfulness is the essential antidote to distrust and resistance to research. It is evidenced by openness and to and serious consideration of community input, by thoughtful listening, and by whole-hearted consideration of community proposals. Being able to incorporate community input and compromise on research questions and procedures in this way requires *flexibility*, another key quality.

Other qualities that help researchers develop credibility with community members include:

- Interest in and knowledge of the community, its history and hopes for the future;
- Demonstrated commitment to addressing important community issues;
- Interpersonal skills to invite and build ongoing access to community expertise and inspire enthusiastic community participation.

6. What do I need to know about funding and publishing community-engaged research?

Interest in funding community engagement is growing in both public and private funding sectors. Federal government RFAs, toolkits, and reports for community-based participatory research (CBPR, a model in which there is the greatest degree of community engagement) are more common now than ever before. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the National Cancer Institute have been leaders in funding federal CBPR initiatives. However, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, reviewers can be unfamiliar with or even skeptical about community-engaged or CBPR approaches. Therefore, it is very important to write a proposal that scrupulously documents all supporting evidence for your study's community-engaged or CBPR model and methods.

In our full guide, you can read more about guidelines to assess the extent to which projects align with the principles of participatory research and criteria for successful proposals. These include:

- Funding should be shared by research and community partners with percentages clearly detailed;
- Linkages between community-defined priorities and the research focus are clearly described;
- Equal attention is devoted to research methods and the building/sustaining of the partnership and community participation;
- Emphasis is placed on community capacity building in the form of job

creation, cultivation of leadership skills among community members, sustaining programs following the conclusion of grant funding, and training of community members in research methods. [[See also: Show Me the Money – Securing and Distributing Funds](#)].

Authorship and presentations are key elements of disseminating research findings. These [guidelines for successful dissemination](#) are very helpful to collaborative research partners. Because agency staff who contribute intellectual content to the research can qualify for co-authorship, researchers and community partners should decide up front what role each will have in preparing manuscripts. A similar process should take place regarding presentations of research findings at community agency meetings, academic conferences, and other venues.

The Council on Linkages between Academia and Public Health Practice developed a list of journals that publish CBPR studies¹. However, as the quality of research improves, more journals are taking part.

7. What are the challenges of collaboration I should think about as I consider research collaboration with a community-based partner?

Some of the obvious challenges or obstacles to community-engaged research are the time and funding required to establish and maintain foundational relationships. Other structural challenges include the culture of academic and community-based institutions. The following are explored in more depth in our full guide:

- Time for planning;
- Time for conducting research;
- Traditional hierarchies in academic and social service organizations; and
- Change in expectations from exclusively publication-driven outcomes

Hopefully these potential obstacles or drawbacks will not outweigh or override the long and short-term benefits of a research collaboration. Your active collaboration in a research partnership means the discoveries you make are more likely to be translated into action and better outcomes for more people.

8. How can the CTSI Community Engagement Program help me find a community organization interested in collaboration?

The [CTSI Community Engagement Program](#) can help you as you take any number of small or large steps at any point(s) along the continuum of engagement with a community partner. The Community Engagement Program can help you consider options for integrating community experience and perspectives into your work. Whether you have a one-time community input forum, convene a Community Advisory Board for the life of your study,

collaborate with a community agency or institution for participant recruitment, or partner with a community agency as a full collaborator, the CTSI Community Engagement Program can help you navigate community engaged research.

When you contact the UCSF CTSI [Community Engagement Program](#), you will have the opportunity to request consultation, training, and other resources to help you conduct community-engaged research.

The CTSI [Community Engagement Program](#) can help you:

- Find a potential collaborator with similar interests;
- Establish a relationship with community-based organization representatives;
- Manage the steps of setting up a research project with a collaborative partner;
- Explore the degree of involvement that would work best for you.

We ask that you fill out a [Consultation Request Form](#) to help us learn more about you and your interests. After you submit a form, you'll hear back from us within a few days with next steps.

To have a form faxed or mailed to you, please call 415.206.4048
or email CEP@fcm.ucsf.edu.

For both researchers and community groups, these UCSF CTSI Guides to Collaborative Research are available online:

- [Collaboration with UCSF Researchers: A Guide for Community Organizations and Agencies](#)
- [Collaboration with Community-Based Clinicians: A Guide for UCSF Researchers](#)
- [Collaboration with UCSF Researchers: A Guide for Community Clinicians](#)
- [An Introduction to Effectiveness, Dissemination and Implementation Research](#) (PDF)

¹ Public Health Foundation: Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health. *Journals That Publish Practice*. [cited 2008; Available from: <http://www.phf.org/Link/practpub.pdf>