

Considerations for Community Engagement

Summary of a literature review by Samuel Fellows, MPH Practicum Student
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Prepared for the Research Exchange Group on Service Learning & Community Engagement

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Identifying Considerations for Community Engagement

In June, 2018, a literature review conducted by Samuel Fellows, a Master's of Public Health practicum student at Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine looked into considerations (barriers and facilitators) to effective community engagement on behalf of members of the Research Exchange Group on Service Learning & Community Engagement.¹ For the purposes of this summary report, community engagement is defined as a community-university relationship that involves including community members in projects that have an impact on public health, including research, program development, and knowledge dissemination. The literature review uncovered eleven key considerations for effective community engagement, all of which can influence overall project success and the willingness of communities and universities to work together. The following table summarizes the considerations, as identified in the literature, and includes examples of situations in which each consideration would need to be addressed, facilitative factors that can help address each consideration, and key references. A second table on page 4 describes the roles of facilitators and intermediaries in engagement.

CONSIDERATION	EXAMPLE	FACILITATORS	REFERENCE
TRUST: <i>Developing trust between partners is important both when forming and maintaining relationships.</i>	Community partners may feel skeptical about researcher intentions and the potential impact of the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking time to form relationships. ● Developing a community presence. ● Working through established networks. ● Addressing community research concerns. ● Including key community members. ● Shared decision-making. ● Transparency. 	Burke, Greene, and McKenna (2017).
ORGANIZATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES: <i>Overcoming different cultural backgrounds, organizational structures, and inherent hierarchies among community and academic partners supports effective engagement.</i>	An Indigenous community may be reluctant to partner with universities on projects addressing their health due to a long history of oppression, as well as non-beneficial and sometimes harmful experiences with institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking time to form relationships. ● Developing a community presence. ● Working through existing networks. ● Transparency. ● Cultural sensitivity. ● Including key community members. ● Having a diverse project team. ● Being open to new viewpoints. 	Di Pietro and Illes (2016).
VALUES: <i>Identifying shared beliefs or attitudes among partners is important for effective engagement.</i>	Differing attitudes towards preventative health approaches between researchers and community members for a project conducted within a community with strongly held religious beliefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing a shared sense of purpose, common goals or shared values. ● Selecting partners with similar values. 	Montesanti, Abelson, Lavis, and Dunn (2016).

¹ The Research Exchange Groups Program is a research capacity-building initiative of the Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research

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<p>COMMUNITY NEEDS: <i>Addressing health issues present in a community helps improve community participation.</i></p>	<p>An Indigenous community may be hesitant to participate in research based on continuously hosting projects that described, but did not <i>address</i>, community health inequities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Modifying the approach to better meet needs. ● Including key community members. 	<p>Brunger and Wall (2016).</p>
<p>PARTICIPATION: <i>Effectively engaging and maintaining community involvement is vital for community engagement.</i></p>	<p>Researchers struggling to engage rural community members in taking a leadership role or identifying community strengths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Including key community members. ● Taking a balanced approach to guidance. 	<p>Harris and Clover (2005).</p>
<p>TIME: <i>Developing strategies for the considerable time demands of community engagement.</i></p>	<p>Representatives from universities and community groups identifying lack of time as a common reason for not participating in community engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forming a work plan. ● Assigning set times to collectively work on the project. ● Setting flexible timelines for deliverables. ● Hiring additional support staff. ● Including additional partners to split the workload. 	<p>Pivik and Goelman (2011).</p>
<p>RESOURCES AND FUNDING: <i>Developing strategies for the best use of available resources and funding.</i></p>	<p>A community kitchen that became dependent upon funding, with success when there was funding and little progress when there was not.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forming a work plan. ● Allocating resources equitably. ● Taking a strength-based approach. 	<p>Traverso-Ypez, Maddalena, Barrington, and Donovan (2012).</p>
<p>COMMUNICATION: <i>Efficient and clear contact between partners helps achieve effective community engagement.</i></p>	<p>Inconsistent project collaborators making it difficult to regularly communicate and slowing the progress of a project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forming a work plan that includes effective communication strategies. ● Holding regular meetings. ● Transparency. 	<p>Jarvis Selinger et al. (2008).</p>
<p>POWER DIFFERENTIAL: <i>Striving for equitable decision-making, project control, and participation helps overcome any implicit power differentials between partners.</i></p>	<p>A researcher employing community members as PRAs having more power due to their role as employer for a project addressing HIV.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflexivity. ● Taking a strength-based approach. 	<p>Greene (2013).</p>

CONSIDERATION	EXAMPLE	FACILITATORS	REFERENCE
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS: <i>Overcoming institutional practices that do not recognize, align with, or support community engagement is key for effective partnerships.</i>	A researcher devoted to participating in community engagement projects may experience difficulty attaining tenure because the work negatively affects publication output.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universities valuing engagement and being open to new viewpoints. Cultural sensitivity. Providing financial or other incentives for community-based research. 	Styres, Zinga, Bennett, and Bomberry (2010).
KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION: <i>Effectively sharing project findings among partners facilitates community engagement.</i>	Community partners may be reluctant to participate in research when previous researchers did not inform the community about project findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing a database covering university research. Spreading knowledge through locally-used resources. Including key community members. 	Brunger and Wall (2016).

The Role of Intermediaries/ Facilitators

The literature review also uncovered information about an important facilitator to community engagement, namely key community members or resources that can act as intermediaries between the university and the community. The table below presents four types of intermediary, the benefits of their participation, some challenges to their involvement, and potential solutions to these challenges. The sample references provided discuss the role of each intermediary in more detail.

INTERMEDIARY	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS	REFERENCE
PEER RESEARCH ASSOCIATES/ ASSISTANTS (PRAS): Members of the community of interest who are employed by researchers to participate on a project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community representation on the project team. Improve trust and community participation. Offer new viewpoints. Improve cultural sensitivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power differentials. Low job security. No formal support system (e. g. ethics board). Feelings of not belonging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflexivity. Addressing power differentials. Creating formal supports. 	Greene (2013).

INTERMEDIARY	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS	REFERENCE
<p>STUDENTS Students who require community work or volunteering experience as part of a given course or program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gain practical experience. ● Provide an opportunity to form community-university relationships. ● Offer new viewpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Challenge of adapting to a new role. ● Organizational differences. ● Not open to differing viewpoints. ● Time consuming. ● Resource intensive. ● Approach does not meet community needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflexivity. ● Being open to new viewpoints. ● Giving time to learn and adapt. ● Modifying the approach to better meet needs. 	<p>Roberts and Jumpper-Black (2016).</p>
<p>INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS Individuals like elders or researchers who provide an Indigenous perspective on projects in their communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer new viewpoints. ● Provide information about the local context. ● Facilitate relationships. ● Aid in knowledge dissemination. ● Help develop cultural sensitivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conflicting values. ● Cultural insensitivity. ● Time demands of forming relationships. ● Feelings of not belonging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing a shared sense of purpose, common goals, or shared values. ● Reflexivity. ● Individual and institutional cultural sensitivity. 	<p>Flicker et al. (2015).</p>
<p>ONLINE PORTALS Websites designed to address community needs (e. g. health).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can engage those who would not have otherwise got involved. ● Facilitate the action of those already involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited resources impact the ability to act. ● Low community awareness of portal. ● Non-representative users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Including community members. ● Hiring support staff to build relationships. 	<p>Smith, Mateo, Morita, Hutchinson, and Cohall (2015).</p>