



# COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

## Racial Equity in Advocacy, Fact Sheet #9

September 2020

This fact sheet is the ninth in the *Racial Equity in Advocacy* series for social policy advocates addressing unequal opportunities by race. Each fact sheet will provide information equipping advocates to embed a racial equity lens into their work to close gaps and improve outcomes for communities of color. Please see the [first fact sheet](#) in the series for a review of key terms and concepts.

Effective policy is impossible without being based in sound research. Philanthropy and decision makers have historically made significant investments into programs that yielded scant results. The current emphasis on funding evidenced-based policies building on “what works” is because of these investments. Some well-intended policies and programs ultimately fail because there was neither sufficient evidence that the policy would work for a particular community nor community buy-in from the start. A powerful solution to the dearth of knowledge on community needs is community-based participatory research (CBPR).

People in low-income communities may be accustomed to outsiders attempting to “mobilize” them around predetermined issues. It is less common in the policymaking process that they have a forum with which to share their own issues and have decision makers actually listen to them.<sup>i</sup> In a typical research study carried out in communities of color, outside researchers recruit community members to administer surveys that aligned with predetermined study goals and methodology. CBPR is different. Community members are actively involved in the planning and design stage of the study. This results in richer data collection because they can help structure survey questions using language and phrasing that makes sense to the community. Community partner-led strategies are also more successful in recruiting community members into research studies than more traditional approaches.<sup>ii</sup>

CBPR is helpful in the collection of quantitative data as well. People are more honest with community data gatherers than strangers, especially people outside of their ethnic group. Community members are familiar with the families, know the history of the community, and know how to probe for additional details when needed. Furthermore, they know how to

rephrase questions when an individual does not understand them, resulting in a more complete dataset with fewer unanswered questions.

## Roles

The power of CBPR lies in the process of building trust and genuine collaborative partnerships. In CBPR, the researchers and community are *partners*, each bringing a critical and valuable piece to the research. Community members are seen as fellow researchers and agents of change. They bring their expert knowledge of the relationships, dynamics, and interactions with systems to the research process. Policy experts and advocates bring expert knowledge of policies, programs, and systems to the partnership. A university partner would bring expertise in evaluation and research methods. Findings are then used to help bring about changes in programs, practices, and policies that can improve health outcomes for the community.<sup>iii</sup>

## Storytelling in Research and Advocacy

In this context, stories are personal accounts of experiences.<sup>iv</sup> Many communities of color use storytelling as a personal coping mechanism to combat dehumanization.<sup>v</sup> It is a way to develop their voices while living in a society that devalues and silences them.<sup>vi</sup>

Storytelling also has potential to influence practice and policy at the community and society levels. A CBPR approach will allow data—community members' stories—to inform and reframe policy discussions about communities of color. CBPR can help shift narratives from those that rely on stereotypes about communities of color to those that more accurately reflect their strengths and needs.<sup>vii</sup>

## How to Get Started

Large datasets found in the Census, CDC, and U.S. Department of Education are all valuable to research studies, but this data does not tell the entire story. Organizations can become engaged in CBPR by seeking the nuanced experiences of local communities as part of their data analysis and research. After making the necessary community connections (Fact Sheet #7, [Building Partnerships](#)), organizations will embark on the collaborative process of co-designing the research with the community.

It will be helpful to identify the answers to the following questions before initial talks with the community:

- Who are your partners? What assets do you need that this group does not already possess? For example, focus groups will need a facilitator who is familiar with the community.

- What are you studying? Develop preliminary research questions but remain flexible. The community may illuminate other lines of questioning that will paint a fuller picture of the issues and needs.
- What resources do you need to carry out your study? For example, it is a helpful show of good will to offer gift cards or some other kind of compensation when recruiting community members into research studies.
- How do you plan to use the research findings? You must be transparent about your dissemination strategy and potential audiences for the findings.
- How do you plan to translate research findings into policy recommendations? It is most effective to continue to work in partnership with your research team (including community members) to help identify what the findings mean for the community and the most beneficial solutions.
- How will you share your final policy recommendations with the community and keep them updated on progress towards securing wins? Remember that the strength of CBPR lies in its partnerships, so full inclusion of the community in advocacy campaigns is valuable for influencing decisionmakers to make change.

## Further Reading

Below are examples of organizations, reports, and projects utilizing CBPR as their research approach.

- [The Research Justice Institute](#)
- [Community-Based Participatory Research: A Strategy for Building Healthy Communities and Promoting Health through Policy Change](#)
- Community Toolbox, [Community-based Participatory Research](#)
- [Research for Organizing](#)

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<sup>i</sup> Minkler, M. and Wallerstein, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: From Process to Outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>ii</sup> Horowitz, C. R., Brenner, B. L., Lachapelle, S., Amara, D. A., and Arniella, G. (2009). Effective recruitment of minority populations through community-led strategies. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 37(6 Suppl 1), S195–S200. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2009.08.006>

<sup>iii</sup> Minkler, M., Garcia, A. P., Rubin, V., and Wallerstein, N. (2012). *Community-Based Participatory Research: A Strategy for Building Healthy Communities and Promoting Health through Policy Change*. Oakland, CA: PolicyLink. Retrieved from <https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CBPR.pdf>

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<sup>iv</sup> East, L., Jackson, D., O'Brien, L., and Peters, K. (2010). Storytelling: an approach that can help to develop resilience. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(3), 17-25. Retrieved from <https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/8762530/PostPubPID16337.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Forward Promise National Program Office. (November 2019). *Disrupting Dehumanization and Affirming the Humanity of BYMOC and their Villages*. Retrieved from <http://forwardpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FP-Dehumanization-Concept-Paper.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Hardy, K. V. (2013). Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 22(1), 24-28. Retrieved from

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/545cdfcce4b0a64725b9f65a/t/54da3451e4b0ac9bd1d1cd30/1423586385564/Healing.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Forward Promise National Program Office, 2019.