

Community-Engaged Research (CEnR)

The Tennessee State University Center for Prevention Research faculty include and collaborate with scholars in the field of community-engaged research (CEnR). One of our goals is to build capacity to conduct this kind of research among interested TSU faculty.

Over more than five decades, academic researchers around the world have worked to increase meaningful collaboration with members of communities and community-based organizations to improve population health. Historically, the preponderance of health-related research studies were designed by academic researchers in ways that marginalized or even abused community members who participated in their studies. Since 1974, institutional review boards and human subjects protection training for researchers have been mandated in the U.S. to prevent mistreatment of people who participate in research. In addition, the field of community-engaged research has expanded as community members have asserted their right to benefit from research about them, and as academic researchers recognize that scientific progress in public health requires appreciation of the wisdom and insights of community members, and skillful collaboration with community organizations to improve the quality of scientific advances.

Successful community-engaged academic researchers engage with community members and organizations at varying times and in different ways. Figure 1 (from Alexander et al., 2020) depicts five dimensions of the continuum of community member participation in research.

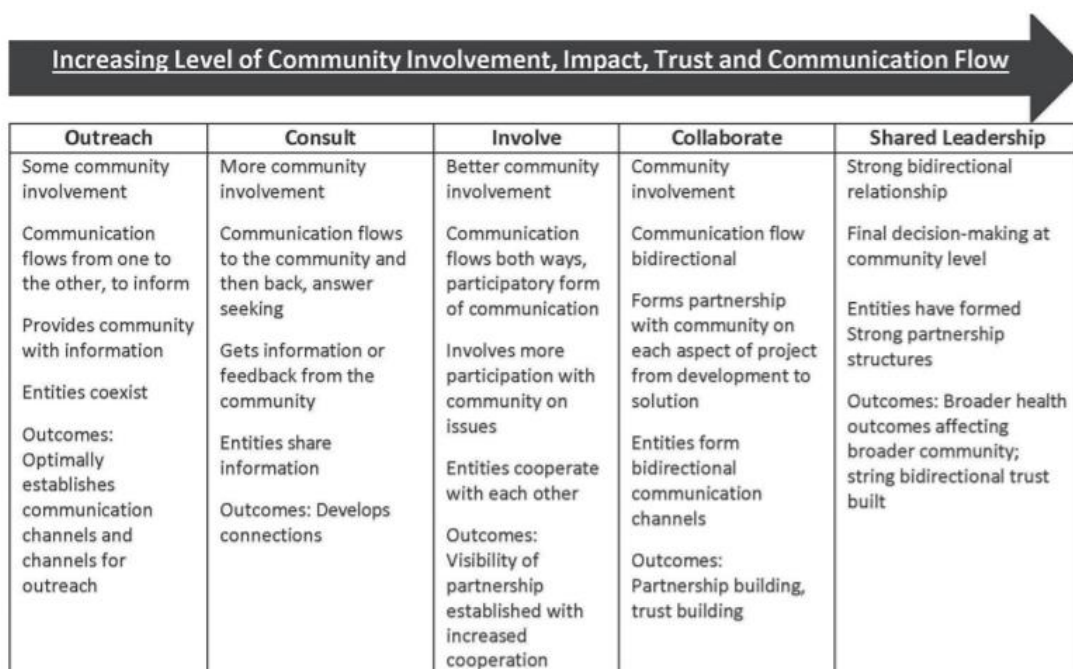


Figure 1. Community engagement continuum

CDC/ATSDR Committee for Community Engagement Principles of Community Engagement 2nd Edition
https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pdf/PCE_508_FINAL.pdf

Forms of community-engaged research (CEnR) have evolved from different starting points along this continuum, and are represented by terms including action research, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and participatory action research (PAR). Among the individuals whose writings and research have contributed substantially to these areas of CEnR

are Kurt Lewin and Nina Wallerstein. Some of their seminal writings are listed in the references below.

Rhodes et al. (2018b) summarized the movement toward community-engaged research as follows: “the community refers to any group of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations. Rather than researchers from universities, government, and/or other types of research organizations approaching and entering a community with a preconceived notion of what is best for that community, community-engaged research builds bridges among community members, those who serve communities through service delivery and practice, and researchers from universities, government, and/or other types of research organizations. In doing so, the experiences of community members, who are experts in their lived experiences and their community’s needs, priorities, and assets, and of representatives from community organizations can be incorporated with sound science.”

Academic scholars who want to be involved in CEnR benefit from training in a range of skills. The following topics for programs to promote development of CEnR scientists have been suggested by Cunningham-Erves et al. (2018, 2021), Jenkins et al. (2020) and others:

- using best practices for engaging various community members and community-based organizations
- training in cultural sensitivity for institutional clinical and translational researchers
- offering education and outreach to community members and health care providers
- establishing community advisory boards
- developing and using software for facilitating collaboration with community members and practitioners
- teaching strategies for communicating with and promoting participation of diverse populations and community groups
- using best practices for recruiting and retaining research participants in clinical and translational research
- developing two-way communication with relevant community groups
- disseminating results from CEnR projects
- planning for sustaining benefits of research in community organizations after research funding ends

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