

Tips for Inclusive Community-Engaged Research



Researchers: Build Trust and Buy-in **FROM THE GROUND UP**



To make sure research reflects the needs and priorities of communities, researchers should:

- **Include community members at every stage of research**—planning the work, implementing it, evaluating it, and sharing results.
- **Listen to the people** in the community and get to know their needs and priorities before you develop your research project.
- **Tap into community members' understanding** of local resources, assets, barriers, and facilitators.



Embrace the wisdom and expertise of trusted messengers.

- **Look for community champions, unofficial “mayors,”** and people with significant established relationships in the community who can grasp clinical information and communicate it well.
- **Identify community hubs and trusted establishments.** Go where the community gathers — barber shops, nail salons, laundromats, libraries, churches or faith organizations.



Find community health workers who reflect and connect with the community.

- **Recruit people from beyond healthcare** for fresh perspective and new ideas.
- **Recognize that healthcare professionals** and other trained medical personnel **may not reflect the local community.**
- **Keep in mind that health literacy and system-navigation skills are more important** than traditional medical or clinical training.



Tailor strategies to the community's needs.

- **Make community involvement meaningful**—build relationships beyond your specific topic of interest.
- **Find out what the community wants to achieve** and build that into your strategy.
- **Work with community partners to identify and agree on outcome measures and success metrics.**

What else supports effective community engagement?

- Encourage funding to support community-engaged strategies and identify community partners as co-leads in research funding announcements (RFAs).
- Add community review to Institutional Review Board processes.
- Make sure researchers have training in both clinical and community preparation from early in their careers, realizing that researchers without the right training or experience can do more harm than good.
- Adjust strategies based on previous research projects in the community, such as lessons learned during COVID-19 pandemic.

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Communities: Ask Questions **BEFORE ENTERING A RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP**



Before partnering with a college or university doing research, communities should:

- **Ask questions** about the institution's commitment to work related to and experiences with community engagement and social determinants of health.
- **Get examples** of the institution's other community-engaged work and ask for references from other community partners. Look at how researchers shared findings to benefit the community.
- **Seek out matching goals.** Look for academic partners with research goals that fit with your community goals.



Look for an academic partner who:

- **Understands community-engaged research** means working together.
- **Includes communities** in research projects from the start.
- **Knows the community** is the true expert.
- **Doesn't see research as "saving the community."**
- **Shows commitment** to the community that goes above and beyond research partnerships.
- **Makes sure researchers are experienced** or trained in working with communities.

This content was developed by the Inclusive Participation Work Group within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL). **Learn more at** covid19community.nih.gov.