



»»»» About Community-Engaged Research



About Community-Engaged Research

KEY POINTS: ABOUT COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH

- Community-engaged research addresses ways to promote health and well-being by working collaboratively with community members on public health research programs.
- Community-engaged research involves collecting information to answer questions, solve problems or better understand topics that relate to public or community health.
- A successful community-engaged research program relies on partners with many different perspectives, expertise, and skill sets.
- Community-engaged research includes processes that ensure a program gets important feedback at every step.

TOOLS, TEMPLATES, AND RESOURCES

- [NIH Clinical Research Trials and You](#)
- [Why Research Matters Brochure](#)
- [Preparing for Community Partnerships Checklist](#)

Answering FAQs

What is Community-Engaged Research?

Community-engaged research addresses ways to promote health and well-being by working collaboratively with community members on public health research programs. Community-engaged research involves collecting information to answer questions, solve problems or better understand topics that relate to public or community health. It can focus on many different things, such as learning the causes of illness, developing new therapies, improving health policies, or addressing disparities in care. It can also address why some community members have lower access to health, well-being, and resources, and how to change this for the better. Gathering valuable knowledge through community-engaged health research can help guide public health research programs and address health challenges that are important to community members.

Example Health Challenges Addressed with Community-Engaged Research

Chronic diseases	Long-lasting illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or obesity.
Infectious diseases	Illnesses that spread from person to person, such as the flu, COVID, or tuberculosis.
Mental health concerns	Stress, anxiety, depression, or trauma that affect groups of people.
Substance use	Problems with drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.
Housing and Food Security	Access to shelter, transitional housing, and supportive services. Low-income housing: Availability, affordability, and quality of housing. Food access and disparities: Proximity to grocery stores, affordability of healthy food, and availability of culturally appropriate nutrition.
Environmental problems	Dirty air, unsafe water, or pollution in the neighborhood. Climate-environmental disaster impacts.

Access to community resources	Proximity to greenspaces, connected and well-maintained sidewalks, public libraries, places of worship, education, community programs (e.g. youth afterschool; adult literacy), recreation facilities.
Transportation	Access to a safe, accessible, well-maintained and reliable transportation system.
Maternal and child health	Issues like not enough prenatal care, low birth weight, or poor nutrition for children.
Access to healthcare	Trouble getting care because of cost, lack of transportation, or not enough local doctors or clinics.
Health inequalities	Differences in health between groups of people, often linked to race and ethnicity, income, or where someone lives.
Access to information	When people don't get clear or reliable health information like not knowing about vaccination clinics, not understanding food labels, finding false health advice online, or not having internet access to look up resources or join telehealth visits.

Why Is Community-Engaged Health Research Important?

Community-engaged health research can improve individual and community well-being, save lives, and improve public health outcomes. It can also help to:

- Improve understanding and awareness of health issues
- Highlight community needs and perspectives
- Enhance the quality of care
- Develop new treatments or interventions
- Reduce disparities, stigmas, and fears associated with health research



Learn more about why research is important in the [Why Research Matters Brochure](#).

Who Runs Community-Engaged Health Research?

Many different people and groups can work together to find ways to make people healthier. These include:

- Community-based organizations
- Researchers and scientists
- Healthcare professionals like doctors, nurses, and public health experts
- Public health agencies
- Large government agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health
- Private companies

Each member of a community-engaged research team helps advance the program using their expertise.

Who Pays for Community-Engaged Health Research?

Community-engaged health research can be funded through many different sources, such as:

- Government grants
- Private foundations
- Corporate sponsors
- Academic institutions

A research program may be funded by one or a combination of these sources.

What Does Community-Engaged Health Research Look Like?

Some of the most common types of community-engaged health research include:

- **Basic research:** focuses on understanding biological processes.
- **Clinical research:** involves human participants testing potential treatments to solve health challenges.
- **Behavioral research:** studies human behavior and how social influences impact health.
- **Health services research:** aims to improve healthcare delivery, accessibility, and efficiency.
- **Social determinants of health research:** focuses on conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age, and their impact on health and well-being.



Learn more about clinical trials on the website [NIH Clinical Research Trials and You](#). Learn more about the US Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2030 initiative [here](#).

How Long Does Community-Engaged Health Research Take?

Program length varies depending on the type and extent of the research, access to funding and resources, strength of the partnerships, and community trust. Some studies may finish within a few weeks, whereas others will last years or even decades.

Forming Community-Engaged Partnerships

A successful community-engaged health research program relies on partners with many different perspectives and skill sets, from grassroots organizers to local non-profit organizations, to government officials, to academic researchers. Any type of organization can start the partnership, and the ability to find funding, staffing, and support will depend on the strength of the partnership. This section explores how to create partnerships with an anchor partner and an academic or public health partner.

Identifying an Anchor Partner

The anchor partner is an organization that can champion community-engaged health research programs, manage and coordinate program activities, and recruit additional partners. Identifying an anchor partner may be required for some funding sources such as grants. If funding is not yet secured, their partnership may help guide the process to seek funding.

Depending on the program, anchor partners can take on different roles. The three most common program models are:

1. **Crisis Management Model:** In the crisis management model, the anchor partner is a **regulated entity** (e.g., health department, military unit, Office of Emergency Services, law enforcement) with full-time staff who manage or resolve major crises or community issues.
2. **Grassroots Model:** In the grassroots model, the anchor partner is usually a contracted community-based organization with experience managing similar programs. They usually use a team approach to lead efforts. Partners may include faith-based groups, nonprofits like the American Red Cross, and **civic organizations** such as Rotary clubs or parent teacher associations, with paid and volunteer staff.
3. **Hybrid Model:** In the hybrid model, the anchor partner can deliver most of the program through its own resources. The organization will also recruit other partners from its network to contribute to the effort.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

United Way of Merced County served as the anchor partner for YMCF. Their strong reputation, experience managing community-wide projects (including food distribution, job training, rapid COVID testing, tax preparation, and more), financial resources, and capable bilingual staff made them well-suited to support the program. Their ability to respond quickly to challenges like bad weather or shifts in demand was critical to the program's success.

Each community may require a different model, so programs should adapt to local needs. Ideal qualities of anchor partners:

- A respected leader or agent of change
- Known as the go-to person or organization for trusted information
- A track record of bringing about positive change
- The capacity and expertise to address significant community challenges
- Strong partnerships and connections to other organizations (e.g., food distribution programs, government agencies, small businesses, large employers, faith-based organizations, school districts)

When reaching out to potential anchor partners, it is helpful to:

- Share a program overview including goals, funding and budget, compensation, timeline, benefits to the community, and role expectations.
- Introduce program specifics, send a one-page brief via email, and then review a program overview slide deck via videoconference.
- Use informal meetings or phone calls to build rapport.

It is helpful to outline program elements before reaching out to potential anchor partners, but plans do not need to be set in stone. Partners from across the community can offer valuable insights when designing and running a public health research program. They understand local demographics and cultural norms and can connect to key community leaders.

Working closely with program partners from across the community and throughout the entire process ensures a community-engaged research program gets important feedback at every step. Setting up a clear communication process early on will help build a strong, lasting partnership.



Use the [Preparing for Community Partnerships Checklist](#) to review steps for successful collaboration.

Identifying an Academic or Governmental/Public Health Agency Partner

Academic and governmental/public health agency partners can offer research expertise, funding assistance, and support in managing complex programs. They will also understand applicable laws and regulations and have specialized data analysis, project management, and communications skills.

To find the right partner:

- Identify local organizations with relevant expertise and find departments within these organizations that are most aligned with program goals.
- Consider the program's focus. For example, a vaccine program might work best with a medical school or county health department, while a water filtration project could be better suited to an engineering school or local department of water quality.
- Reach out to local advisory boards or professional networks that can create connections to different groups.

Be aware that academic and governmental/public health agency partners may have added processes like legal reviews or publication policies, which could affect program operations and timelines.