

## Unit 1 Section 1.1: Definitions, Rationale and Key Principles in CBPR

### Definitions

There are multiple definitions for community-based participatory research (CBPR). We have chosen to highlight the definition used by the Community Health Scholars Program, a WK Kellogg Foundation-funded post-doctoral fellowship program in CBPR. The program defines CBPR as:

*“A collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change...”*

~ Community Health Scholars Program

Key words here are “collaborative,” “equitably,” “partners,” “combining knowledge with action” and “achieving social change.” The intent in CBPR is to transform research from a relationship where researchers *act upon* a community to answer a research question to one where researchers *work side by side* with community members to define the questions and methods, implement the research, disseminate the findings and apply them. Community members become part of the research team and researchers become engaged in the activities of the community. For a comparison of the how the CBPR process compares to that of traditional research, [see Figure 1.1.1](#)

### Rationale

CBPR has its roots in social and political movements of the 1940s, which saw a revitalization in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1940s Kurt Lewin began talking about *action research* as a means to overcoming social inequalities; he also rejected the notion that in order for researchers to be “objective” they needed to remove themselves from the community of interest. Later writings by educator Paulo Freire in the 1970s brought to the fore issues of having communities identify their own problems and solutions.

The rationale for CBPR builds on this history. Below are reasons why more communities and researchers today are increasingly turning to CBPR approaches to research:

**There is a growing recognition that “traditional” research approaches have failed to solve complex health disparities.** Many research designs fail to incorporate multi-level explanations of health and the researchers themselves do not understand many of the social and economic complexities motivating individuals’ and families’ behaviors.

**Community members themselves, weary of being “guinea pigs” are increasingly demanding that research address their locally identified needs.** Traditional researchers often complain about challenges in trying to recruit “research subjects.” These challenges are often a result of community members feeling that researchers have used them and taken findings away for the researchers benefit (e.g., scholarly papers) but the community is left with no direct benefit.

**Significant community involvement can lead to scientifically sound research.** Researchers using participatory methods have found community input invaluable in the design and adaptation of research instruments to make the tools user friendly, applicable and culturally appropriate.

**Research findings can be applied directly to develop interventions specific for communities.** The specific outcome of CBPR research is not simply to find answers to complex social questions but to have those results provide information that can be used by the community to develop its own solutions.

**This approach to research has the potential to build greater trust and respect between researchers**

**and communities.** Trust and respect are two common reasons why individuals do not participate in research. If the research design and methods actively engage community members in an equitable manner, trust is likely to build.

### **Key Principles**

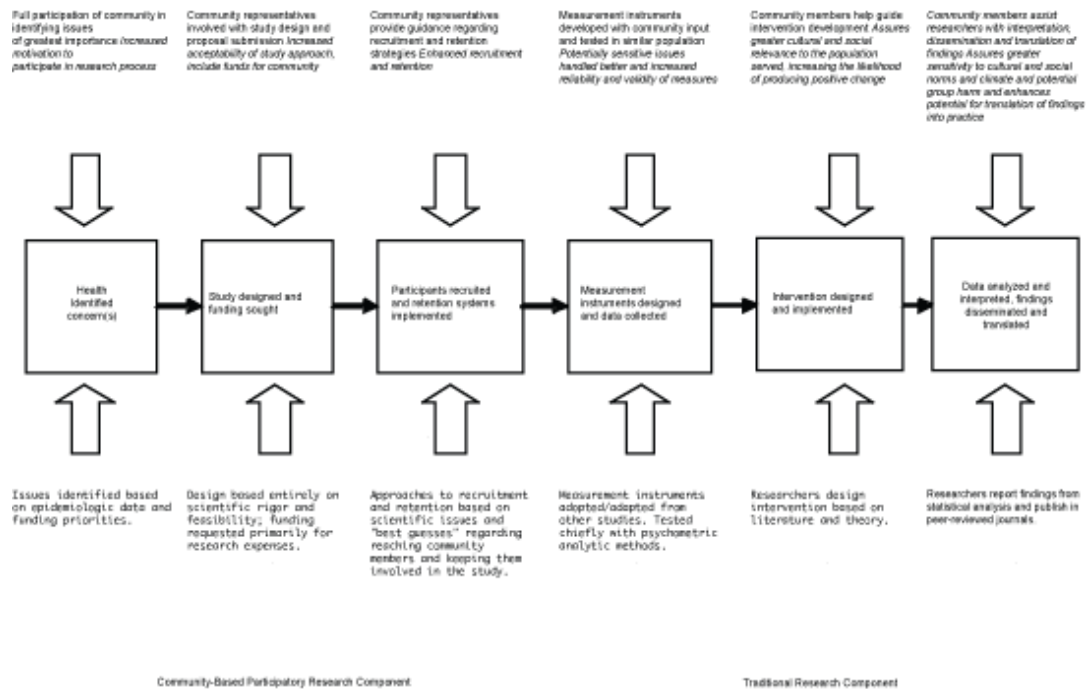
Developing community-based partnerships that are successful in creating relationships and research initiatives that are locally relevant take time and patience. A number of authors have advanced principles for CBPR. Drawing on over a decade of experience, Barbara Israel and her colleagues have identified eight key principles of CBPR that support successful research partnerships and are widely cited.

These include:

- Recognizes community as a unit of identity
- Builds on strengths and resources within the community
- Facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research
- Integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners
- Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities
- Involves a cyclical and iterative process
- Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives
- Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners

While principles are a useful guide, they should not be imposed upon a project or partnership, and that they should be allowed to continually evolve to reflect changes in the research context, purpose and participants. The process of developing principles and making decisions about the partnership's characteristics is essential to building the infrastructure of the partnership.

### **Figure 1.1.1: Comparison of CBPR and Traditional Research**



[Click here to enlarge Fig. 1.1.1](#)

## Exercise 1.1.2: Discussing the Definitions, Principles and Rationale of CBPR

You are about to have your first full meeting of your CBPR partnership.

Consider the following questions and then develop your agenda for the first meeting:

- Do you believe it is necessary to discuss these definitions and principles of CBPR and their rationale at the first meeting? Why or why not?
- If you decide to include discussions of some or all of them, who should bring these up and how?
- What power dynamics would you want to consider in a discussion of this nature?

**Assignment:** Write the agenda for the first partnership meeting. Be sure to include: the meeting purpose/goal; the meeting chair(s); the meeting timeframe/location. Describe each item for discussion on the agenda clearly, along with who is expected to facilitate it. Be prepared to present and discuss your agenda and its rationale.