

Community-based participatory research—or CBPR—involves the combined efforts of academic researchers and members of the general community. CBPR aims not only to contribute to scientific knowledge, but, in the process, to address areas of particular concern within the community at large. By placing emphasis not on controlled collection and analysis of data, but on direct action and problem resolution, CBPR studies may bring research conduct out of laboratory settings and into the context of ordinary life.

The work of CBPR study teams represents a range of research areas, including epidemiology, behavioral science, environmental science, and other types of research aimed at achieving desired health outcomes. Past CBPR work has sought new approaches to outpatient mental health care, HIV treatment in rural areas, adolescent diabetes prevention, and health promotion among immigrant women. In 2010, researchers published the results of a CBPR study in which staff of 52 hair salons led informational sessions with some of their clients about the Michigan Organ Donor Registry. The study found that clients who attended their stylists' informational sessions were about twice as likely to enroll in the donor registry as those who didn't.

While CBPR may sometimes benefit the community more quickly or directly than a traditional scientific approach, it also comes with certain additional risks, which may be less tangible than those encountered in most scientific research. For example, by directly identifying its design and objectives with members of a given community, a CBPR study may inadvertently subject that community to undesirable public exposure. This may lead to stigmatization, discrimination, or political consequences. Because CBPR tends to seek direct solutions to familiar problems, the community may feel especially disappointed or frustrated if a CBPR study fails to meet all of its proposed objectives. This might even damage the community's trust in an academic institution involved in the research partnership, and possibly in research in general.

When reviewing CBPR studies, IRBs face some special challenges. As CBPR studies are action-oriented, they may be more likely to evolve over time. Individuals participating at first as subjects in a CBPR study may even decide to join the partnership as researchers. IRBs must balance the unique benefits of CBPR partnerships with their duty to ensure that research complies with all applicable federal and institutional regulations. Members of the general community who serve on IRBs play a crucial role in maintaining and guiding this balance. In some cases, an IRB may decide to enlist the help of a consultant with knowledge of a particular segment of the community.

Since most CBPR activity occurs at sites where the University of Michigan does not have cooperative review agreements, an institutional authorization agreement—or IAA—may be necessary to enable

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a University IRB to review and approve the research for the entire partnership. The IRB should consult with institutional officials and the Office of General Counsel when constructing the IAA.

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Contact the IRB for more information about community-based participatory research.

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