

Collaborating for Change: Community-Based Research and Political Advocacy

Honors Think Tank on Social Change

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This article explores the history, methods, use, and impact of existing community-based research in the University of Utah and Salt Lake City communities in order to identify weaknesses that might be best addressed by structural changes within the University or communities. This kind of research is used in informing policy, political activism, and advocacy. In addressing these issues, the authors discuss their findings from their research project: a community dialogue event that brought together community members, representatives of organizations working in both community and University of Utah settings, faculty, students, and staff from the University of Utah, and policymakers to discuss strategies and benefits of institutionalizing support for community-based research at the University of Utah to benefit the community and University students and faculty alike. Members of the Think Tank on Social Change developed and facilitated this dialogue to address the gap between theory and application of community-based research; namely, that the research findings are not being disseminated in a way to effectively inform advocacy and activism for policy change relevant to the research. Emerging themes from the community dialogue are addressed, and recommendations for improvement in the use of community-based research identified.

Each fall, thousands of geese fly south for the winter in precise V formations. This strategic formation allows the geese to increase their flying range by a full 70% compared to a goose flying solo – each goose benefits by the uplift created by the goose ahead of it (Shea, 2010). The V formation represents a complex system of support among the geese, which continually rotate in the position of head of the ‘V’ so that no single goose labors too long, and every goose acts as a leader. Fellow geese honk at one another to encourage others to keep going and keep speed. If a goose falls out of formation from weakness or injury, two geese companions accompany it to lend help and protection. The fallen goose is watched over until it is able to join the formation or until it dies. The geese then fly out and often join another group to catch up with their own formation (Muna & Mansour, 2005).

Researchers can learn a lot from these geese. Those characteristics central to the V formation provide an excellent framework to consider how humans can work together to accomplish positive social change through community-based research. Community-based research (CBR) represents a shift

from more traditional research toward a methodology emphasizing collaboration between communities and academia. Like the V formation, CBR aims to “get somewhere” by including a focus on bringing about action as inherent to the research process. Just as geese take turns leading the V formation, in CBR “leadership shifts during a project as a result of the varied expertise that community members and academics bring” (Stoecker, 2004). Alongside academic researchers, community members play vital roles in the research process as “inside experts” in their communities, lives, and experiences. The CBR model values the community voice and academic voice collectively.

As with any flock of geese, there is a lot of ‘honking’ in CBR because of its focus on social change and social justice. Advocacy is central to the goals of CBR, and results of research must be shared with the appropriate community stakeholders with the purpose of policy change. Perhaps the strongest link we see with the V formation is that CBR is about “partnering with those who have been wounded – who lack decent housing, decent jobs, decent rights and freedoms – to move the entire flock” (Stoecker, 2004). In keeping with

this idea, CBR refers to a distinct methodology which contains, at its core, an emphasis on action. CBR is not just a research method; it is an approach and commitment to translating research into tangible positive change in the community in the form of advocacy and activism directed towards policy change.

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

The models of community-based participatory research (CBPR), collaborative research, community-directed research, and participatory action research (PAR) are interrelated to (and sometimes referred to as) community-based research. At their core, these models strive to create a research process that is mutually beneficial for communities and academia. In CBR, researchers are better able to understand problems that community members face by acknowledging them as experts in their own lives and experiences, and then utilize that knowledge in all stages of research. By collaborating in the design, collection, analysis, and dissemination of data, academic researchers and the community members both benefit from data that may not only be more relevant than traditional research methods, but more accurate as well.

Research generated by this kind of methodology has great potential to affect many levels of policy by building on the knowledge and tools that exist in order to make community voices heard. The University of Utah’s University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) – which focuses specifically on the west side of Salt Lake City and supports University professors, students, and community members and organizations in creating mutually beneficial partnerships between academia and communities – explains that CBR “starts from the assumption that valuable expertise exists in the community, and that this expertise can and should contribute to the production of new knowledge by being incorporated into the research process” (Brown et al., 2007, 4). Essentially, CBR bridges the gap between those traditionally “doing the research” and those “being researched.” Rather than an expert-recipient relationship, CBR creates and supports a dual, collaborative sharing of knowledge across all stages of research. Ideally, CBR promotes not only a more meaningful research process, but meaningful results: “[CBR] presupposes that working with community members as co-researchers renders results more accessible, accountable, and relevant to people’s lives” (Flicker, 71). By rejecting academia and community researchers as sole holders of knowledge, both become partners in creating relevant processes, findings, and resulting actions.

Although developed relatively recently as a formalized methodology, CBR builds upon historic legacies of community-based organizing, social work, and social movements. Today, it is a burgeoning field and has an established body of academic literature¹. Wallerstein and Duran’s (2006) discussion on the roots of community-based participatory research

Figure 1: Traditional Research Schema

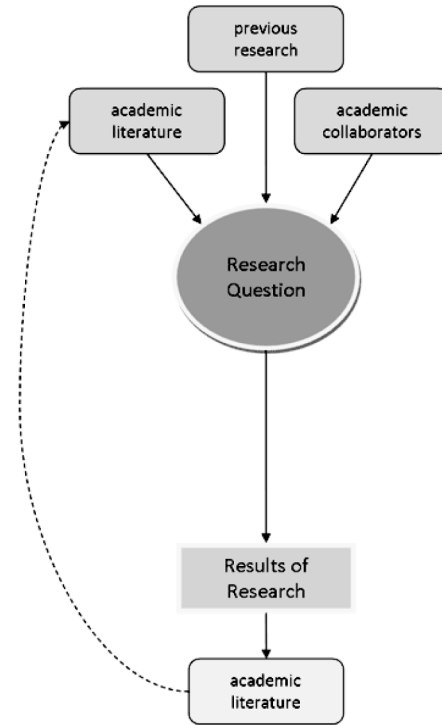


Figure conceived and created by Dr. Colleen Reid and Dr. Elana Brief

Figure 2: Community Based Research Schema

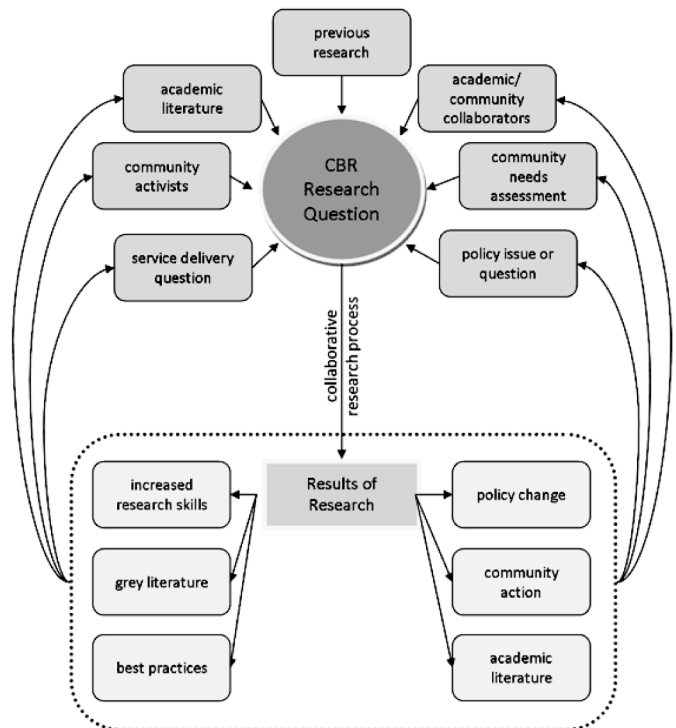


Figure conceived and created by Dr. Colleen Reid and Dr. Elana Brief

states: “Good CBPR practice...demands a recognition of historic or current oppression and assurance that all parties will materially benefit from the knowledge produced” (215). Furthermore, “all the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort” (Kretzmann, 1993). Practitioners have explored who benefits from a CBR approach, and by examining a CBR initiative designed to “improve the conditions of Canadian young people living with HIV,” Flicker (2008) breaks down benefits into two categories: stakeholders and the research itself. Stakeholders are identified as HIV-positive youth, academics (researcher-clinicians), and service providers. All stakeholders “felt that ‘the research itself’ benefited from its participatory approach” by creating better questions, recruitment, data collection, analysis, communication of results, and action (Flicker, 75).

Often, traditional forms of research focus on benefiting research and researchers at the expense of the community it claims to benefit. An example of this is the now-infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study conducted from 1932 to 1972 by the U.S. Public Health Service on nearly 400 African-American sharecroppers. Although penicillin was established as a cure for syphilis in 1940, researchers deliberately withheld treatment from the participants in the study until a whistleblower’s report halted it in 1972 (U.S. Public Health, 2009).

Understandably, traditional forms of research can evoke feelings of distrust among communities toward outside researchers based on a sense of being “used for research” rather than benefiting from it. In a report to University Neighborhood Partners the Community Research Collaborative stated, “These efforts may have limited impact and leave communities feeling exploited as ‘research subjects’ who never benefit from the potential good inherent in research” (Brown et al., 2007). Gaining sufficient community goodwill to proceed with CBR can be a long and delicate process, but it is necessary in order to have true community participation. Only through community participation can community members have the sense of ownership needed to fully stand behind the results of the CBR and use those results to the fullest extent possible to accomplish the change they see as necessary. “After all, the real measure of the success of a community-based research project is whether the resulting product is actually studied, used, and disseminated to further the social action or social change intended” (Backman, 2006).

RESEARCH INFORMING POLICY

There are currently a number of ongoing CBR projects in Salt Lake City. Think Tank member and student researcher

Annika Jones is currently engaged in a CBR project at University Neighborhood Partners Hartland Partnership Center (UNP/Hartland). University Neighborhood Partners, a University of Utah organization, supports partnerships between the University and community. Hartland is one of UNP’s partnerships located in an apartment complex in Salt Lake City. Hartland residents represent a unique and diverse population; many families have refugee or immigrant backgrounds, and come from all around the world – from Mexico to Somalia, Tanzania to Armenia. With her co-researchers, two 13-year old Hartland residents, Jones is conducting a youth participatory evaluation of the UNP/Hartland Youth Center and youth programming. Together, the research team has developed and defined research questions, including, “Do [the youth] feel like they belong at the Youth Center?”; designed research methods such as focus groups with youth; and analyzed data. The team is preparing to disseminate the data to all stakeholders, including Hartland residents, UNP/Hartland staff, and the youth themselves, in order to look at a youth perspective on the programs designed for them.

Many of the emerging themes from the research specifically address youth program policies. For example, one of the questions the team asked, which the youth co-researchers thought was important to include, was “Do you think you have a say in how the Youth Center is run and what kinds of activities there are for youth in this community?” The responses from youth have been instrumental in helping evaluate the Youth Center and make changes that will better serve the youth involved. For example, one youth said: “I think there should be, like, different times for big kids and little kids. Maybe like the little kids first and then later the older kids... If it was like that, you would have a lot more older kids come to the youth center. I don’t like hanging out with the younger kids ‘cause they’re just...too childish.” In response to the process and results of the research process, Jones commented, “It was exciting for us to see the youth so excited about this question – they had some really interesting and good ideas, and it seems like they had just been waiting for someone to ask them what they think” (Jones, 2010).

The research team agrees CBR is ensuring the research findings lend themselves to positive changes in policies and community empowerment, specifically with the community of youth at Hartland. Community and academic researchers engaged in CBR are empowered first by the participatory process, then by the application of research results. Unlike traditional research, in which results often appear only in academic literature and settings, the results of CBR produce development in multiple arenas (see figures 1 and 2), including policy change and community action.

While policy change can happen at many levels, we see the use of CBR in informing public policy as especially important: “Collaborating with social scientists can provide marginalized groups with...resources and, as a result, add a critically needed perspective missing in discussions of social prob-

¹Support from academic literature, of course, represents only half of the puzzle: it would be erroneous for us to examine the legitimacy of CBR without considering community perspectives. We hope these perspectives are sufficiently explored throughout the paper.

lems conducted in the academy and the halls of government” (Stahl, 1613). CBR has the potential to change policy because communities who feel that their experiences and opinions aren’t being validated by existing political structures can feel a sense of empowerment. As CBR methodology challenges the traditional power structure of research, its process can successfully challenge traditional power structures of policymaking by encouraging the community to participate fully in the political process.

Although traditional research methods are inherently designed to benefit academics, CBR has a more complex system of benefits and reciprocal learning: “It seeks to empower participants by enabling them to identify issues of relevance and possible solutions to the problems they perceive” (Doyle and Timonen, 2009, 246). A root value of CBR is its effort to “balance research and action” (Minkler, 115). CBR must not only incorporate both research and action but have each inform the other. Research can be misdirected, but is often best done investigating a need that the community or a community member has already noted, because that provides initial direction to a real issue of concern to the community. This research must inform the action taken; but if the action results in a change in situation, a continuing CBR project on that issue must examine the previous research, the action, and the results in its action when determining how best to proceed. Accomplishment of this method requires a careful balance between research and action, making sure that both occur, that one is not superseded by the other, and both are informed by each other.

When articulating how CBR and advocacy interrelate, it is important to consider advocacy as an integral element of CBR rather than a post-use. A CBR initiative in Chicago, for example, brought together academic and community partners to study what the community saw as flaws in long-term care systems, then develop and carry out strategic political action addressing their concerns – these researchers attempted to “balance research and action.” Through various research methods (including qualitative interviews, life narratives, focus groups, and town hall meetings), the collaborative research team explored the issues and developed action plans, “including the community’s next steps in working to affect policy change” (Minkler, 117).

CBR theory emphasizes that no one knows better what is necessary for success within a community than the individuals that make up the community themselves – accordingly, no perspectives are more appropriate to influence public policy than those of populations affected by those policies. As Jones’s youth participatory evaluation at UNP/Hartland illustrates, youth at UNP/Hartland have the potential to improve youth programming policies in their community and the application of CBR toward policy advocacy and activism has great potential to improve the quality and relevancy of public policy. CBR findings, then, are capable of informing and shaping policy decisions in meaningful ways in order to ultimately reflect the people that legislation tries to represent and

serve. Amplifying the voice of the “critically needed perspective” of marginalized or silenced communities in policy-making arenas speaks to a basic tenet of responsive government. A collaborative research team in Chicago who examined the Rehabilitation Act determined that “...the process [of CBR] offers great promise for bringing the public back into policy making, and we believe results of this and similar inquiries have equal promise for rendering disability [and other] policy conducive to the public good. Shared stakeholding can lead to sounder policy” (Cantrell, 42). In its many forms, CBR is invested in accessing strengths of a community to identify and address its needs and assets to affect positive change: when we examine this concept with a political context in mind, there is great potential to better inform policy and its effect on communities.

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH IN UTAH

Numerous academic and community partners in Utah are working together to conduct exciting community-based research. Increasingly, university curriculum, organizations, and professor and student research reflect CBR values and methodology. Utah Campus Compact (UCC), an umbrella organization serving as the central organization for a “coalition of Utah’s college and university presidents and their campuses,” encourages Utah’s universities to strengthen their foci of service-learning, CBR, and other forms of civic engagement in the academic process by providing them with resources and support (Utah Campus Compact).

At the University of Utah, a striking example of coordination supporting community-campus collaborations through is the previously mentioned University Neighborhood Partners (UNP). UNP’s Web site describes the scope of their work:

An average of about 200 University of Utah students, faculty, and staff contribute at least 6,500 hours of community-based research a semester to UNP’s 13 existing partnerships. Over 150 students and about three dozen faculty help to build these reciprocal relationships between the University and west Salt Lake neighborhoods, creating pathways to higher education for west Salt Lake families. Almost every department (academic and non) on campus is involved in UNP partnership work. (“Facilitating Mutually-Beneficial Community-Based Research”, 2007)

Certain areas of academia have been more responsive than others to the dual benefits of CBR. Utah’s law schools, for example, have used CBR in recognizing and utilizing their unique academic position as it relates to communities and legal access. Linda F. Smith, a law professor at the University of Utah who has been involved in significant amounts of CBR with her students, considers: “Might student seminar papers be read not only by the professor, but by a community agency needing the research and analysis for its own work?” (Smith, 2004). Much of the CBR undertaken by law students and professors focuses on increasing access to the court system by examining and addressing obstacles to legal services. A

course at Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School led by Professor James Backman requires students to interact directly with community members in creating "concrete products" which benefit their communities. The syllabus for the class states: "The community will be involved in shaping the desired research, in collaborating with you in producing the research, and in using the results of the research" (Backman, 2006). Examples of past "products" developed by students include lesson plans on alternative dispute resolution for elementary schools, immigration reference tools, and an improved electronic version of The Utah Domestic Relations Manual. Legal CBR has the ability to support a community to arm itself with the legal knowledge and backing it needs to advocate for itself in the policymaking arena.

The foundations of CBR, which recognize specific strengths offered by community input into the research process as inherent to their specific knowledge of the subject, parallel another crucial element of CBR on the University front: accessing the unique knowledge and strengths of academic programs and groups toward CBR with that focus. Hundreds of professors, student and faculty groups, and organizations across the state are now using CBR methods to examine issues from health care and education to poverty and homelessness on both a local, state, national, and global level.

The Office of Global Health, located in the Department of Family and Preventative Medicine at the University of Utah's School of Medicine, is changing the way that global health is approached. This office is utilizing community-based participatory research as a foundation to "engage in community partnerships that focus on collaboration and sustainable outcomes, regardless of culture, political boundaries, or geographic location" (University of Utah School of Medicine, 2009). One of its 'flagship' programs is the Barekuma Collaborative Community Development Program (BCCDP). The BCCDP is a collaborative effort between Ghanaian institutions such as the Koufo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH), the city of Kumasi, the Kaname Nkrumah University of Sciences and Technology (KNUST), and the University of Utah's School of Medicine. The purpose of the BCCDP is to expand community outreach in addressing health issues with early interventions and preventative practices.

Central to the BCCDP is the principle that the voices of community members and organizations of the Kumasi village must be heard, respected, and incorporated in order to create positive social change. An example of the successful community ownership the BCCDP supports is the recent development of a toilet facility. Kumasi citizens voiced concerns about inadequate water sanitation in their community; academic researchers were able to find evidence that bacteria were being transmitted into the water through human waste. Collaboratively, the implementation of a toilet facility in the village was proposed and agreed upon. However, this plan of action was not without complications. Dr. Stephen C. Alder,

associate director of the Public Health Program at the University of Utah and a partner in the BCCDP, poses the question: "How do you put a toilet system in a rural community without electricity when practice has always been to use a bush?" (Alder, 2010) It may have been easy for the "outside" academic researchers to fund and build a toilet system but "we [as stakeholders] weren't really interested," he said. Instead, the BCCDP chose to focus on "developing capacity for local partners to take on the project themselves."

Today in the Kumasi village, the toilet facility project is under construction and is scheduled to be finished in 2011. During the course of the project "over time, the American team started to be replaced by more Ghanaians and local engineers began to take on the work" (Alder, 2010). The development of the BCCDP project illustrates the complexities inherent to CBR engagement – relationships must be built and supported, roles defined and redefined, and diverse perspectives considered holistically.

The BCCDP project also speaks to the relationship of CBR to public policy. Dr. Alder believes a stumbling block to sound policy is that it too often is made with no grounding in practical reality. Several policies in Ghana, he explains, are ineffective due to a lack of resources to support them. For example, national policy in Ghana requires communities to maintain "adequate" sanitation systems; without resources or support, these policies are impractical and ignored. To address this concern, the BCCDP holds "demonstration programs" with the Ghanaian national government to provide a realistic picture of what appropriate policies accomplish. With community members, academic researchers, and political leaders working as equals in a process to form realistic policy solutions, Ghanaian policy will be better prepared to address issues in its communities. The University of Utah's School of Medicine and Office of Global Health, with the BCCDP, are extremely committed to community-based research as a means to empower communities and address both social and health issues.

On a local scale, non-profit organizations and advocacy groups across the state are involved in important community research and engagement. Voices for Utah Children, the only nonpartisan multi-issue child advocacy group in Utah, serves as an excellent model of an organization using research to help influence policy at both the Utah State Capitol and in Washington, DC. For 25 years, Voices for Utah Children has advocated on the behalf of children and their families using demographic information, personal accounts, observational data, and statistics gathered from the community. The Utah Health Policy Project, the state's leading nonprofit devoted to comprehensive health reform and health equity for all Utah residents, gathers stories from people throughout Utah about the uninsured, under-insured, Medicaid, and health disparities. According to UHPP Executive Director Judi Hilman, "story banking really provides an excuse to get out and meet people who are directly impacted by the issues

at hand. We're glad to have the story to help illustrate the need for specific policy changes, but that is only the first step toward full engagement in advocacy. What we really want is for the story sharer to find his or her own voice in the policy arena" (Hilman).

Other non-profit and advocacy organizations in Utah are recognizing the potential of CBR to contribute to their goals and objectives toward social justice. Equality Utah, Utah's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender advocacy organization, fights for LGBT civil rights at the state and local policy-making levels. Among its goals and objectives, the organization aims to "empower...individuals and other organizations to engage in the legislative process." Brandie Balken, executive director of Equality Utah, explains:

Equality Utah sees the importance of CBR and utilizes this important tool to inform its' policy choices. Historically, we have been most engaged in public meetings and one on one story banking. However...I realized that there are several other opportunities we have to use CBR. There are many opportunities to engage students interested in CBR through the Bennion Center, UNP and UROP [Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program]. This not only increases the capacity of non-profits, like Equality Utah, to engage in meaningful CBR. It also provides an opportunity for students to do research that is meaningful and can have a direct impact on their own communities. (Balken)

We acknowledge that there is excellent momentum at the University of Utah toward engaging communities through academic means, especially in the area of service-learning, as service-learning education is closely related to CBR in academics. The Lowell Bennion Community Service Center at the University of Utah coordinates volunteer and service-learning opportunities for students, staff, faculty and alumni, connecting them with community and non-profit organizations statewide. Renowned as an exemplary model of promoting service-learning across campus, the Bennion Center staff provides training, support, and curriculum development for professors incorporating service-learning into their courses. Backman praised the Bennion Center as an "invaluable resource in developing connections with community organizations" (Backman, 2004). Although not all Bennion Center projects involve CBR, many have the potential to do so. Faculty members in many colleges and departments are developing CBR projects aimed at developing relationships with the community and providing meaningful exploration of community issues. Additionally, UNP engages communities in many ways, including CBR, and has had incredible success in supporting collaborative, meaningful relationships between the University of Utah and west side communities. The relationships that UNP and the Bennion Center already have with community members and organizations in many of the communities surrounding the university are an invaluable resource for students and faculty looking to do CBR, especially as many students must accomplish their work in a relatively short time span and may not have time to build relation-

ships with communities from scratch. Since the service-learning projects at the Bennion Center were all created to address a legitimate community need, these projects are good candidates for CBR.

WORLD CAFÉ GROUP DIALOGUE EVENT

As members of the Honors College Think Tank on Social Change, we are invested in understanding how individuals and groups use their experiences and passion toward creating transformative and sustainable changes in their communities. By studying historic and contemporary examples of this kind of work and combing them for common themes and strategies, we look for ways we can promote social justice in our own communities. Our combined experiences and understanding maintain that valid collaborative research happening in local communities is already playing an important role in greater community-university engagement. However, in order for CBR to be effective, it must serve as a catalyst for action and change; CBR is about "getting somewhere" beyond academic journals and bookshelves. By informing political activism and empowering communities to advocate for themselves, CBR generates research that "goes" toward social change.

In order to explore the gap between CBR and political activism, we needed the input of community members, community organizations, university faculty, staff and students. In maintaining values of CBR, we sought the collaboration of many perspectives to consider how university and community partners could better utilize CBR for social change. On April 9, 2010, we hosted a World Café event themed "Bridging the Gap between Community Based Research and Activism: A Dialogue on Social Justice Work." Nearly 70 people from many different communities and campus, and policymaking organizations attended.² In round table discussions, high school students, legislators, college students, community organizations, activists, and advocates generated ideas on how CBR can act as a method of creating positive policy changes.

The World Café model is a unique way to bring together many stakeholders to collaborate and generate ideas. Participants are invited to sit at tables with other people with dynamic backgrounds and experiences to share ideas about a topic. Questions are asked to encourage dialogue about the topic being explored. Each table has a host, who facilitates discussion and ensures that all voices at the table are heard. The dialogue is recorded by a scribe, in writing and in visual representation, and each table reports back to the larger group about their findings. After each session, participants are encouraged to move to a new table and sit with new people in order to facilitate greater collaboration.

²We are grateful to all of those who participated in this day of research. Each participant took a valuable place in shaping the ideas of the day and transforming ideas to commit CBR beyond research and into action.

We explored the following three questions in roundtable discussions:

1. In what ways can CBR inform activism and advocacy in our community?
2. What are barriers that prevent CBR from informing activism and advocacy?
3. How can we overcome these barriers and create an environment that benefits the community and university partners, and informs policy?

These framing questions were developed after examining feedback from conversations with community and University partners regarding their perspectives on successful ways to generate meaningful collaboration toward this purpose. These questions were not meant to be comprehensive nor lead to a particular response. In keeping with both the CBR and World Café model, our goal was to allow the dialogue to flow with the interests of the participants and to generate many perspectives and ideas.

Out of the many exciting ideas, perspectives, proposals, and comments heard at the event, several important themes emerged. The themes generated by questions asked at the World Café can be organized into two categories: obstacles and recommendations. Following are specific comments from participants in quotations, along with summarized ideas gathered from discussion.

CBR SHOULD SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.

AS ONE PARTICIPANT SAID, “[ACADEMIC] RESEARCHERS NEED TO KNOW WHEN IT’S TIME TO STEP BACK AND STEP DOWN, AND BE WILLING TO DO IT.”

OBSTACLES

Legitimacy of Community-Based Research

Among community members, academic institutions, and policymaking bodies, CBR is often not viewed as legitimate. Administrators and policymakers, university partners explained, often view CBR as “soft” research, and inferior to more “discipline-defined” research. Faculty and professors engaging in CBR are seen as being distracted from their “real research.” Many academic researchers worry they will lose their credibility as researchers if they engage in CBR, especially when that CBR leads to political advocacy or action. One World Café participant wondered, “Can I be an objective researcher and also an effective advocate?” Correspondingly, both community and academic researchers shared how their CBR findings were viewed as “anecdotal” by state legislators.

Communities often do not view CBR as a legitimate means for social change either. Community members’ hesitancy to engage in CBR might speak to a real or perceived lack of the research to be relevant in the community. As a University of Utah student noted, “Even if an academic

researcher has good intentions going into a community, they should also keep in mind that they could unintentionally cause more harm than good. Will it lead to positive change, no change, or negative change?”

Relevancy of Community-Based Research

Effective CBR includes a clear plan for action. World Café participants asked, “Will more community-based research lead to more advocacy? Even if collaborators plan to include advocacy as part of their research, will that advocacy lead to change?” One participant remarked, “I might be a broke Latino and a researcher will do research explaining why Latino/a communities are in the low economic level... but that doesn’t do anything for me... I’m still broke.” This comment illustrates a common perception of research done on communities and underscores the necessity of incorporating into the structure of CBR a plan for how the research results will be used to help the community. While many different forms of research could potentially help marginalized communities, they often succeed only in speculating on, defining, or theorizing community issues. CBR, on the other hand, can perhaps explain why a particular population or community tends to be of lower economic status, but also develops strategies for creating social and/or policy changes which directly address the concern. Furthermore, a CBR project must outline a plan for sharing the results of this CBR with the community members and organizations appropriate to accomplish these solutions in order to maintain relevancy in the community.

Communicating Research Effectively

Most of academic research is traditionally published in academic journals or presented in formal research symposiums. Research might include recommendations for policy change, but is rarely presented to those who make policy. In order for CBR to achieve social change, projects should be better communicated to all stakeholders. Academic journals and research symposiums might work to communicate with others in academia, but when it comes to presenting findings and recommendations to community members and policymakers, alternate methods should be considered. One participant at the World Café suggested, “What about making sure that all these different stages of research – including planning and disseminating it – are available in public spaces?” All research must connect with its target audience; CBR’s target audience includes academic, community, and (often) policymaking stakeholders. Navigating these systems is a complex process for partners in CBR, and World Café participants expressed their concern that researchers are unwilling or unable to go “outside their box” to effectively communicate CBR. In order to engage communities, could university-community partnerships present their research on the radio, on television, in newspapers, or at coffee houses? Correspondingly, can collaborators find ways to present CBR to policymakers in a way that supports its legitimacy and relevancy?

Limited Resources

Limited resources prevent both CBR from taking place and its application to promote policy changes. Relationships are central to the success of CBR projects, and several participants recalled experiences when they were unable to spend the time they needed to develop important collaborative relationships. For academic researchers, this lack of time might come from a pressure to publish “results,” or to focus on more traditional forms of research. Community researchers, especially those in marginalized communities, might face other constraints preventing them from spending time on CBR, including jobs, limited day care, or familial obligations.

One professor at the World Café shared his struggle to maintain an ongoing CBR initiative due to limited economic resources; if he and his academic partners spend significant time writing grants and fundraising, they find themselves under pressure from academic administrators to create “publishable” works. If they focus on publishing, the CBR initiative suffers from lack of funding and attention. One graduate student explained, “many students go on to be professors thinking they can create research that will help communities, but then they get pushed into the game of tenure, and that game doesn’t favor this type of research.” For many tenured professors who are involved or want to be involved in CBR, the time they can devote to it is small and for many has to be put off until they are finished with their tenure track. While securing sufficient resources is a challenge with many forms of research, World Café participants felt that this struggle was especially relevant when considering CBR, because it reflects the deeper values central to CBR – namely, the legitimacy of CBR in academia and the flexibility of CBR to its community collaborators.

RECOMMENDATIONS*Develop a Support System for CBR*

It was exciting to hear of the many organizations, communities, and professors already engaged in CBR; there was a strong consensus from the World Café that there is a need for a strong support system for these and other researchers. While UNP, the Bennion Center, and Utah Campus Compact provide valuable support, participants identified other potential sources of support for CBR collaborators. We support the idea of a resource center accessible to community members, community organizations, and academic partners devoted exclusively to promoting and supporting CBR as an effective means to create social change. If guided by an advisory board consisting of stakeholders across community and university groups, the resource center could represent a neutral and safe space to develop and maintain meaningful partnerships moving toward advocacy and activism.

A major concern voiced at the World Café was that many academic and community researchers do not know how to use CBR in informing legislators about current or potential legislation. A CBR resource center would serve as a space to educate both researchers and policymakers about effective

ways to access CBR as valuable community input. Ideally, a resource center would act as a safe and legitimate place for those engaged in CBR, build upon support systems already in place, and educate stakeholders about the value of CBR in informing public policy.

Formalize Standards of CBR

CBR is a relatively newly developing form of research, and World Café participants made it clear that not everyone is “on the same page about what the rules are for best practice in CBR.” Formalizing standards of CBR, and including in that model a mandatory “plan for action” would both support CBR as legitimate among academia and communities, but also assure CBR projects are appropriate, relevant, and promote positive social change – this would be helpful in increasing community trust and acceptance of CBR as a research method that includes and values community expertise. One World Café table developed the following guideline:

“CBR is a method of research in which researchers from the University of Utah collaborate with community members or organizations as researchers on a specific community issue that the community members or organizations feel is appropriate. The primary aims of CBR are to empower the community by acknowledging that they are experts in their lives, identify the underlying history and causes of all relevant aspects of the issue at hand, examine these in the context of current community reality, discuss possible strategies and tactics to bring about appropriate changes, determine an action plan for making those changes, and share the results with the community members necessarily involved in or affected by this action so that they have the research data they need to be effective in bringing about change.”

While this statement is by no means comprehensive or conclusive, it can serve as a guideline for developing a formal CBR model to apply across *all* colleges and departments in universities.

CONCLUSION

The tangible excitement and enthusiasm of the World Café participants speaks to the passion community and university partners utilize in creating social change through CBR – this flock of geese has real momentum. Participants, like geese in a V formation, recognized that CBR collaborators must be strategic in achieving collective goals. Each member of the flock must recognize and utilize the strengths that the other members bring to the table, and just like the noisy geese, collaborators in CBR must be willing to continue honking to create awareness surrounding social justice and social change. Locally, important and meaningful CBR is paving the way for positive social change through political advocacy and activism – yet there is much more work to be done. By extending the reach of research, CBR accesses the invaluable knowledge in our communities and creates collaboration for change.

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