



COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

UNDERSTANDING TRUST AMONG PRC PARTNERS

– EXECUTIVE SUMMARY –



SUBMITTED TO:
PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTERS PROGRAM OFFICE
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

SUBMITTED BY:

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COMMUNITY-INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS UNDERSTANDING TRUST AMONG PARTNERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

OVERALL SUMMARY

Involvement in community-based research provides considerable benefits and challenges for academic researchers, state health department representatives, and community members. Each group has an interest in the success of these endeavors, but they often have divergent visions, motives, and views with respect to their involvement and potential benefits. Developing and maintaining meaningful relationships on common ground can be a challenge for all parties. Yet, because of the integration of knowledge with potential for action, the work of community, state, and academic relationships holds great promise for these partners, their funding sponsors, and other external stakeholders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Prevention Research Center (PRC) program consists of 33 academic centers that function as a consortium of academic, state, and community partners tying prevention and intervention science to practice. The PRCs differ in the focus of their research, priority populations, and composition of community partners. Similarities in process and ultimate outcomes, however, have been identified. The PRCs developed a national conceptual framework that identifies and describes components common to all PRCs. One critical element in the national framework involves factors relevant to the development and maintenance of relationships, of which one critical factor is trust. Trust was rated by PRC partners as the most important element of the program relative to the other identified elements (see results of the Community Concept Mapping project).

The current project builds on this earlier work and is designed to define and characterize the concept of trust in the context of the PRC relationships. Specifically, the project was designed to provide: 1) understanding of the common attributes and behaviors of trust associated with establishing and maintaining partnerships, and 2) an assessment of whether a tool can be developed to measure trust within PRC partnerships. Through a contract with CDC, ORC Macro conducted a review of the literature and a qualitative examination of PRC partners' views about trust. The literature review was undertaken to determine whether a relevant measure of trust was available from the published literature and to identify major theoretical and empirical components of trust. Later, with ongoing guidance from an advisory group of PRC state, academic, and community representatives, focus groups were conducted in the winter and spring of 2004 to learn partners' experiences with and opinions about trust in community, state,

¹ This summary highlights information and results of three separate reports: (1) *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – A Review of Relevant Literature on Trust*; (2) *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – Focus Group Summary*; and (3) *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – Feasibility Focus Group Report*. For a fuller description of the projects, please refer to the appropriate report, which can be found on the PRC web board.

academic relationships. This qualitative work sought to characterize partners' perceptions of trust in their relationships and determine whether these perceptions are based at an individual or organizational level.

Based on these projects and the PRCs' interest in obtaining instruments that can help them assess the work and relationships of their own centers, a tool was drafted to help PRC partners identify and discuss the opportunities for and challenges to building and maintaining trust in their partner relationships. The initial assessment revealed that participants found the tool to be feasible, valuable, and appropriate for use in their partnerships. As these partnerships are essential in the work done by the PRCs, the tool may aid in the development of highly functioning relationships working to improve the health and quality of life of communities. Additionally, we are pursuing further work to establish whether information from the tool can be used as the basis for developing a formal measure of trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose

A search of the literature was conducted to explore and conceptualize trust and associated constructs, specifically as they may relate to community, academic, and state agency relationships. Key words related to interpersonal trust were searched in three databases—*PsycInfo*, *PubMed* and *Sociological Abstracts*—for all years through October 2003.

To ensure the review would address a manageable set of articles on contexts similar to PRC relationships, some references were eliminated based on one or more of the following criteria:

- All references to non peer-reviewed journal articles were eliminated. Those eliminated included dissertations, book chapters, and descriptive articles such as literature reviews.
- Also eliminated were those articles that had been published anywhere other than the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, or Canada.
- Abstracts were reviewed, and any article that did not address trust “directly,” meaning, the concept of trust was not a pre-determined variable of interest in the study, was discarded.
- Articles that explored “dispositional” trust were eliminated. Disposition was defined as the tendency of someone to act in a certain manner under given circumstances. Therefore, we also eliminated articles in which a measurement instrument was used to assess “dispositions” or a person’s tendency to be trusting or distrustful toward a particular object or group. For example, Rosenberg’s “Faith in People” scale was eliminated because it assesses people’s tendency to be trusting (e.g., “*Do you feel that most people would try to take advantage of you if they had the chance or would they try to be fair?*”)²

² Rosenberg, M. (1957). Misanthropy and political ideology. *American Sociological Review*, 21(4), 690-695.

- Articles that measured “general” trust as opposed to “person-specific” trust also were eliminated. For example, Rotter’s commonly cited “Interpersonal Trust Scale” was eliminated because the scale’s questions relate to people’s trust in a non-specific group of people as opposed to an individual (e.g., “*Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.*”).³

The remaining group included 44 articles from peer-reviewed journals that measure trust within specific, non-intimate relationships, published in the US, Canada, UK, and Australia.

Findings

The literature reviewed provided some useful points of consideration for measuring trust within PRC relationships. First, the literature on trust is robust across a number of contexts, and it provides validated measures and methods for measuring trust when specific trust compared to generalized trust is being assessed. It also reveals useful information about how trust can be measured as an affective construct or a behavioral construct, the latter of which is more closely linked to behavioral outcomes associated with varying levels of trust. There also is substantial consistency across contexts with regard to definitions of trust, with “risk,” “expectancy,” and “power differentials” emerging as the most consistent and critical constructs.

Researchers, however, emphasize the importance of tailoring measures and constructs to the specific context of interest, which could be particularly critical in the case of assessing trust in PRC relationships. The primary reason for this is a presumed equality among partners. If power differentials do exist between partners, it may be necessary to explore further these power differentials and how amenable they are to intervention and negotiation. If they do not exist, risk and expectancy might impact these relationships differently as well. Communication and negotiation may be even more critical in relationships in which power differentials are less transparent.

The notion that individual-level variables can be generalized to organizations is described as the “cross-level fallacy,” a common approach, but one against which some researchers caution. It is, however, clear that one cannot examine institutional trust without examining interpersonal trust. Individuals may represent organizations, yet the relationships in which they are engaged have a personal component. Similarly, the literature shows that distrusting interpersonal relationships can destroy people’s trust in the institutions represented by those relationships. Further, longevity of relationships can increase trust, particularly when awareness is raised that issues such as value congruence, communication, and dependability matter to those in the relationship.

³ Rotter, J.B. (1980) Interpersonal trust, trustworthiness, and gullibility. *American Psychologist* 35, 1-7.

Based on the literature review, a list of relevant definitions of trust was generated for use in developing trust constructs. (The list of definitions can be found in Appendix B of the report, *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – A Review of Relevant Literature on Trust*.) Using these definitions, a card sort activity was conducted with the PRC advisory group members. Through this activity, the advisory group assisted in labeling the definitions as constructs of trust to be used in the first set of focus groups. This list of trust constructs included:

- Competent
- Dependable (reliable)
- Fair
- Value Differences
- Show Discretion
- Respectful
- Caring
- Honorable (just)
- Mutual Benefit
- Clear Expectations (transparency)
- Keep information confidential
- Share information
- Truthful (honest)
- Responsible (accountable)
- Equality (classless)
- Accessible (approachable)
- Openness
- Considerate
- Helpful (facilitating)

FOCUS GROUPS I

Purpose

The purpose of the first set of focus groups was to learn more about PRC partners' experiences with and opinions about trust in community, state, academic relationships. In February, March, and April 2004, six focus groups were conducted with state, academic, and community representatives of PRC relationships (two groups per audience). Groups included both men and women representing PRCs across the U.S. Participants' experience with the PRC ranged from six months to more than 13 years.

All the focus groups were conducted in hotel meeting facilities. Each group lasted approximately one-and-one-half hours. Structured moderator's guides were used for all the focus groups to maintain consistency. Academic and state participants received a pedometer in thanks for their time. Community participants received \$50 to reward their participation.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form, which stated that participation was voluntary; assured confidentiality; described how the data would be used and for what purpose; and established that the discussion would be audio taped, subsequently transcribed, and the tapes would be destroyed at the end of the project. Skilled moderators led the discussions and activities. Each focus group discussion began with the facilitator providing a brief history of the project and addressing participant questions or concerns. Each group ended with a card sort activity, where participants rated different trust-related constructs found in the literature review. Participants also were encouraged to add any constructs they felt were important to trust in their PRC relationships but were not already included in the list. Participants sorted constructs into piles as (1) relevant, (2) neutral, or (3) irrelevant within the context of the PRC partnership. (More details on the card sort activity and

results can be found in Appendix D of the report, *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – Focus Group Summary.*)

Findings

The participants discussed a number of experiences and ideas related to trust in their PRC partner relationships. Across the groups, several themes emerged, which illuminated the concept of trust within the context of the PRC and the unique relationships and interactions that contribute to its definition. Some of these themes were discussed throughout the course of the focus group discussion (cross-cutting themes), while others emerged in response to specific questions on the moderator’s guide.

The cross-cutting themes resulted from or were carried throughout participant discussions across several moderator guide questions, such as:

- “What pre-existing (if any) ideas or expectations did you have about working with this partner(s)?”
- “Did any events take place in these initial stages, or were there any pre-existing factors, that encouraged ... or discouraged trust among partners?”
- “When you think of those initial behaviors or actions, would you attribute those to the institution/organization or the individuals at the table?”
- “Thinking of how those relationships or other long-standing PRC relationships have unfolded. Have any of those relationships we discussed resulted in something you consider to be ‘trusting’ or ‘distrusting?’ How would you characterize that?”

Cross-cutting themes included:

- *Functional vs. Personal Concerns:* Across the groups, the state and academic participants often raised issues and concerns that were more similar in nature than those raised by the community groups. State and academic groups discussed several functional issues that can and, in some cases, do impact trust in their PRC relationships and other contractual relationships, many of which occur on an organizational level, such as contractual and budget demands. Community members, on the other hand, primarily addressed topics of a more personal nature. Community members more often identified areas related to the relationships among the individuals involved in the partnership—spending time together and learning about each other’s interests outside of the partnership.
- *Responsibility for Trust:* Participants in the community, state *and* academic groups seem to lay the responsibility for improving trust and PRC relationships on the academic partners. In several instances, participants talked about events that had occurred when academic members of the PRC did not consider the thoughts and opinions of the other partners in their actions, discouraging trust among partners. Academic participants also addressed this issue, explaining that the nature of academia as well as the university system sets up challenges to working with the PRC that often are not understood by other partners.

- *Challenges with Grant Funds:* Another point highlighted throughout the group discussion was the challenge in working with grant funds, specifically when the public health issue being funded is not considered a problem by the community. Several participants mentioned that the health concern of interest to the PRC often is not the same as that of the community and described the obstacles this can create for the partnership—the state and academic groups being obligated to fulfill contractual obligations, while the community members may feel unheard or not considered. Participants discussed this topic as both a challenge they currently face in their PRC relationships as well as an issue that would impact their relationships if it should occur.
- *Conflicted Community Representatives:* Community representatives described the tension between wanting to improve the quality of life, health, and environment of their communities and allowing outside researchers, whose intentions may be not be sincere, into their communities for PRC work. They also expressed that, as gatekeepers for their communities, they felt some guilt over their role in the PRC and in permitting research in their communities. Community members described that this pull on their energies can negatively impact the way they function within the partnership and their view of the other partner members.
- *Differences in Perceptions:* From focus group discussions, it seems there may be some incongruity between academics’ perceptions, that the PRC relationships are good and trusting, and community members’ own experiences as described in their conversations. Often, community members discussed challenges, including relationship building and power struggles they personally had in establishing and maintaining trust with their academic partners. For their part, academics either rarely addressed these issues or attributed them to the university structure or to other academics “in general.”

Some of the themes emerged from specific focus group questions. These included:

- *History:* Across the groups, when asked, “What pre-existing (if any) ideas or expectations did you have about working with this partner(s)?” several participants described positive pre-conceptions and expectations about working together, usually due to a successful past history with one or more members of the partner groups. Participants stated that these positive pre-conceptions helped establish trust from the beginning of the partnership and promote a positive working relationship throughout the course of activities.
- *Unique Nature of PRC Partnerships:* When asked, “Did any events take place in these initial stages, or were there any pre-existing factors, that encouraged ... or discouraged trust among partners?” participants revealed that because partner groups are so different in terms of their individual motivations, agendas, and environments establishing and maintaining a successful partnership is challenging. Because of this and as an example of how a “trusting” PRC partnership would look, participants described the need to set aside individual differences from the beginning of the relationship and create an “us” culture, a set of shared values and beliefs on which all partners can agree.
- *The Individual is Key:* When asked, “When you think of those initial behaviors or actions, would you attribute those to the institution/organization or the individuals at the table?” focus group participants agreed that trust primarily resides at the individual or

interpersonal level. Across the groups, community, state and academic participants discussed the development and maintenance of trust occurring among individuals rather than organizations. Further, participants discussed distrust resulting from organization-level interactions. Representatives agreed that organizational barriers, challenges, and at times negative reputations can result in a distrusting environment and poor working relationships.

FEASIBILITY FOCUS GROUPS

Purpose

Based on the first set of groups—and ongoing guidance from an advisory group of PRC state, academic and community representatives—a tool was created to help PRC partners identify and discuss the opportunities for and challenges to building and maintaining trust in their partner relationships. The tool was created to address constructs of trust that were found in the literature and were identified as important through the first set of focus groups, as well as constructs that emerged in the focus groups as particularly important and relevant to one or more individual partner group. The table below illustrates the constructs selected for the tool and the source(s) from which they came⁴.

Table 1: Trust Tool Constructs and Sources

Source	Constructs	Literature Review	Focus Group Discussions (Independent of Exercise)			Focus Group Rating Exercise—Very Relevant		
			Community Partners	State Partners	Academic Partners	Community Partners	State Partners	Academic Partners
Card Sort	Dependable	X	X	X		X	X	X
	Mutual Benefit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Good/Clear Communication (Clear Expectations)	X	X	X	X		X	
	Truthful	X	X			X	X	X
	Responsible	X				X	X	X
	Accessible	X				X	X	X
	Open (flexible)	X			X	X	X	X
	Values Differences	X			X	X	X	X

⁴ Table 1 consists of the constructs that are included in the revised trust tool. Some of these constructs were part of the list used in the card sort activity during the first set of focus groups, while others came out of the focus group discussions. Constructs that came out of the focus group discussions also may have been addressed in the literature (and here are identified as such), though they may not have been included in the initial list for the card sort activity.

Source	Constructs	Literature Review	Focus Group Discussions (Independent of Exercise)			Focus Group Rating Exercise—Very Relevant		
			Community Partners	State Partners	Academic Partners	Community Partners	State Partners	Academic Partners
Discussion	Share Power/Responsibilities	X	X		X			
	Relationship Building		X					
State Additions to Card Sort	Supportive			X	X		X	
	Intellectual Integrity	X					X	

The tool included several components. These are listed below. (The original tool can be found in Appendix A of the report, *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – Feasibility Focus Group Report*.)

- *Response Form A*, an exercise to help individual members of the PRC identify constructs of trust and associated expectations they feel are important to the functioning of their particular PRC partnership;
- *Response Form B*, an exercise in which members then rank constructs and expectations, derived from Response Form A, in order of importance and identify if they are currently occurring in their partnership; and the
- *Facilitated Discussion Guide*, an activity centered around a structured discussion in which members talk about their partnership’s strengths and weaknesses, as revealed in the previous activities, and devise ways to improve their partnership functioning.

To test the feasibility of the tool and its parts, ORC Macro conducted a second set of focus groups with state, academic, and community PRC representatives. The purpose of these groups was to obtain representatives’ ideas and opinions about the utility and feasibility of the tool and the processes for completing it.

In July and August 2004, a total of three focus groups were conducted with state, academic, and community representatives of PRC partnerships (one group each). Groups included both men and women representing PRCs across the United States. All the focus groups were conducted via telephone. Each group lasted approximately one-and-one-half hours. Each academic and state participant received a \$25 Amazon.com gift card in appreciation of his or her time. Each

community participant received \$50 in thanks for his or her participation. Consent was obtained prior to beginning the discussions.

Findings

The second set of groups tested the feasibility of the tool and overall findings are presented below.

- *Condense the Tool and Process:* When asked, “What do you think about this process?” participants agreed that the tool and the process for completing the tool were cumbersome and time-consuming. Participants thought the process could be completed more simply in one or two steps. They also stated that respondents would lose interest in completing the activity as it was structured and suggested eliminating one of the response forms and folding the questions into the facilitated discussion.
- *Provide More of a Context for the Tool:* Several times during the groups, participants suggested that the way the tool is presented to the PRCs will be critical in gaining participant support and ensuring use of the materials. Participants suggested including background and informational materials in a packet that would describe why the tools were created, their purpose and objectives, and the benefits each partner group would receive in using the tools. Participants further added that, along with the additional background pieces, conference calls, face-to-face meetings, and other communication means should be used to introduce the tools, explain their purpose, and answer any questions or address concerns. These responses were stimulated in response to questions such as, “What do you think about this process?” “How could this entire process be introduced in a way that would help it seem relevant to PRC members?” and “What else would be needed to help PRCs utilize these materials on their own?”
- *Allow Tailoring of the Tool:* Across the groups, many participants agreed that, while the tool addresses partnership issues and components, there might be other subjects the partners wish to discuss that are not captured in the materials. Participants suggested that the forms allow for tailoring the exercises and facilitator’s guide to address additional issues. Participants stated that given the time commitment required to complete the tool, the process should allow groups to discuss other matters of importance in addition to trust. This idea was discussed at several different times during the group, particularly in response the questions, “Do you think this form captures the important questions to ask to assess expectations and possible hindrances to trust?” and “Do you think the format is user-friendly and would likely be well received by others in your PRC?” Probe: “What suggestions, if any, do you have for revisions in the format?”

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Because the PRC relationships among state, community and academic representatives are unique and hold such promise for public health, aligning partner perceptions and creating a positive, trusting working environment is necessary not only for appropriate functioning of the PRC but also for the future of these types of partnerships in any public health arena. These projects sought not only to learn more about PRC partner perceptions of trust and their partner

relationships, but also to develop tools to help partners enhance their working relationships. As these partnerships are essential in the work done by the PRCs, the tools will aid in the development of highly functioning relationships.

As a result of the feasibility focus groups, the tool was revised to address the concerns of the focus group participants. (The revised tool can be found in Appendix D of the report, *Community-Institutional Partnerships: Understanding Trust Among PRC Partners – Feasibility Focus Group Report*.) Several steps were taken to modify the tool, including:

- *Response Form B* was eliminated, and the ranking component of the tool was included in *Response Form A*.
- *Response Form A* was re-designed to better illustrate the step-by-step approach for completing the form.
- A facilitator instruction sheet was developed to address concerns that the process for completing the activities was confusing and to ensure structured use of the materials.
- “Other” categories were added to *Response Form A* to allow participants to tailor the tool by including any other components they wished to address in their partnership that were not already represented in the tool.
- Additional contextual description was added to the tool to better explain its purpose, why it had been developed, and its potential benefits to the PRCs.

The next steps in this study include conducting a pilot test of the revised tool with four PRCs in the Fall of 2005. This pilot test will ensure the tool is useful in supporting PRC partner relationships and enhancing trust among members. Lastly, further exploration of an instrument to measure trust is being conducted. From the components of trust rated important, factors needed for a trust instrument can be explored. The effort will focus on designing a measure of trust, determining appropriate factors for inclusion, and considering options for its utilization.

The background is a complex, multi-layered abstract painting. It features a central scene of an interior room with a chandelier hanging from the ceiling and a large arched doorway. The color palette is rich and varied, including shades of blue, green, yellow, red, and black. The style is expressive and textured, with visible brushstrokes and overlapping layers of color. The overall effect is one of depth and complexity, suggesting a rich, multi-faceted subject matter.

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