

Academic–Community Partner Interaction Study

Results

This study focused on answering the question, “How do PRC researchers and their communities interact to develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate the core prevention research project?” The question was designed to capture information on approaches to community-based participatory research (CBPR). Results from this study provide data to answer the following overarching evaluation questions: How is CBPR implemented across PRCs? How are communities and partners engaged in the PRCs’ activities? How does participation in the PRC Program build community capacity? Data from other studies and indicators will supplement this study’s findings.

PRCs must balance the benefits of engaging communities in research (e.g., increased relevance, effectiveness, and feasibility of interventions; increased collaboration among partners having diverse skills and knowledge to solve complex issues) and the challenges associated with research partnerships between academic institutions and communities (e.g., conflict over different perspectives, assumptions, values, and beliefs of the partners; a historically inequitable distribution of power and control among researchers, community members, and others in the partnership).¹

This study describes the following elements:

- Community partnerships and committees.
- Capacities of community committees.
- Types of participation in core research by community committee members and key partners.
- Academic and community partners engaging in CBPR.
- Community involvement in the PRCs’ research over time.
- Perceived benefits and challenges associated with being in the PRC network, as viewed by academic representatives.
- Perceived benefits and challenges associated with being in the PRC network and in the National Community Committee (NCC), as viewed by community committee respondents.

The text notes when the results came from document review (data from all 33 PRCs) or interviews (data from nine PRC representatives per interview guide; the interview guide number is specified).

Community Partnerships and Committees

Determining the Core Research Community (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Interviews with nine academic representatives and nine community committee representatives (from the same nine PRCs) provided information on how PRCs determined their core research communities.

Academic Respondents

The academic respondents shared a variety of ways in which the academic representatives of their PRCs first came together with their core research communities. A couple of respondents noted that the academic institution's history of conducting research within a community before the existence of the PRC was a major factor in determining the research community. According to a few respondents, the faculty members wanted to extend or enhance research already under way with a partner community,* and the mission and agenda of the PRC served as a way to achieve that objective. A few other respondents mentioned that the community selected had a unique infrastructure, provided an opportunity to engage in research in new and different ways, or had a particular need that was not present in other surrounding communities or that was not being addressed by other PRCs.

A couple of respondents noted that academic institutions were interested in working with communities that had both particular health needs and the capacity to carry out activities without heavy involvement by the institution. For example, one respondent stated,

[The community] already had a common priority to us...and they really had the capacity to carry out programs and involve diverse stakeholders in the process.

Most academic respondents reported that faculty members and the partner communities jointly decided during the preparation of the PRC grant application to build on research already being conducted in the community. A few academic respondents from PRCs that did not have a prior relationship with the research communities indicated that several communities responded to a request for potential projects and collaborations, and then the PRC chose a community because it had an established, ongoing project to bring to the collaboration.

Community Committee Respondents

Most community committee respondents said their involvement in the core research stemmed from their having leading roles on various boards and committees in the community, which the PRC knew about. A couple of respondents noted they were interested in working with the PRC because the PRC already had partnerships with community entities (e.g., community groups, social gatekeepers).

* The partnering communities referred to by the academic respondents reflect only their partner communities.

Community Committee Descriptions (Document Review)

All PRCs are required to have at least one community committee. The PRC Program allows flexibility in how the PRCs define the role of community committees, but the committees generally provide guidance and local expertise to a PRC overall and about the core research. The PRC's community committee is expected to have guidelines that lay out principles of how the academic and community partners work together. As part of the document review, the evaluators abstracted the committees each PRC listed in the Community Committee sections of the PRC IS.[†]

Regarding overall center community committees, two PRCs have more than one and one PRC does not have any, yielding a total of 35 such committees. Three of these committees have 501(c) (3) status, a tax law provision that grants exemption from federal income tax to various charitable, non-profit, religious, and educational organizations. The number of members on the 35 committees ranges from 4 to 43, with a mean of 21 (data not shown).

PRCs also have other types of community committees or subcommittees through which they gain community input on PRC activities. Across the 33 PRCs, the document review identified an additional 57 community committees (Table R-18). These committees are specific to a project, a community, or content; three are youth advisory committees.

Table R-18. Distribution of Community Committees, by Type

Committee type	Number of PRCs	Number of committees
Overall center community committee	32	35
Project-specific committee (core research only)	10	15
Community-specific committee	4	8
Content-specific committee	3	4
Youth advisory committee	3	3
Communication committee	1	1
Scientific committee	2	2
State or national committee	4	4
Subcommittee	3	12
Other committee	6	8
TOTAL		92

Source: PRC Information System, fiscal year 2006.

[†] Some PRCs listed committees that do not represent community perspectives (e.g., a scientific committee).

Community Committee Meetings (Document Review)

Nearly three-quarters of the center community committees meet quarterly or more frequently (Table R-19).

Table R-19. Number and Percentage of Overall Center Community Committees by Frequency of Meeting (N = 35)

Frequency	Number (%)
Semiannually	4 (11%)
Three or four times per year	3 (9%)
Quarterly	16 (46%)
Monthly	5 (14%)
Every other month (six times per year)	5 (14%)
Other	2 (6%)

Source: Documents submitted by PRCs.

Of the 35 overall center community committees, half (17) meet at a location in the community, while the others meet either at the academic institution or alternate locations between the community and the academic institution (Table R-20).

Table R-20. Number and Percentage of Overall Center Community Committees by Location of Meeting (N = 34)

Location	Number (%)
In the community	17 (50%)
At the academic institution	10 (29%)
Alternate location or location between community and academic institution	6 (18%)
By telephone	1 (3%)
Unknown	1 (3%)

Source: Documents submitted by PRCs.

Core Research Committees (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Interviews with academic and community committee representatives provided information on community committees related to core research.

Academic Respondents

Most academic respondents said they had a community committee or advisory board for their PRC's core research projects. Most academic respondents characterized meetings with their community partners as frequent and beneficial to collaboration and communication of objectives, challenges, and resolutions. The range in frequency of "key working" meetings included monthly, every other month, quarterly, and semiannual. Most respondents reported that formal meetings were convened in person, and that informal communication, which was more common, occurred either by telephone or in person. In a few instances, respondents reported occasionally meeting via Web or video conferencing.

Most academic respondents noted that many of their meetings with community partners occurred at a venue in the community; only one respondent said that meetings were held at the academic institution. Another respondent reported that meetings occasionally took place at a geographically central location. The presence of academic representatives varied. Most respondents reported that, on average, the percentage of academic members of the committee who attended meetings ranged from 75% to 100%. A couple of respondents said that attendance by academics ranged from 25% to 50%. Most respondents also noted that the academic presence at the meetings ranged from two to four persons. One respondent reported that the academic presence at the meetings was by invitation only.

According to some academic respondents, the persons responsible for setting the meeting agendas included community committee directors and co-directors. A couple of respondents reported that meeting agendas were the responsibility of various community committee representatives. A couple of respondents noted that the development of meeting agendas was a collaborative effort shared by community partners and the academic institution.

A couple of academic respondents indicated that the PRC director, community committee director, or both chaired meetings, and that the person who facilitated the meeting varied based on the meeting type (e.g., subcommittee, community advisory board, full partnership). However, most respondents stated that the responsibility for facilitating meetings belonged to a community committee representative (e.g., community board chair or co-chair, executive board director).

Community Committee Respondents

Similar to the academic representatives, most community committee respondents said that formal meetings were held in person. In a few instances, respondents reported meeting via teleconference. Most respondents said that many in-person meetings occurred at a facility located in one of the partnering communities. Most community committee respondents said it was easy for them to attend meetings, as long as they received advance notice. A couple of community respondents said the distance and timing of the meetings sometimes posed a challenge.

Most community committee respondents reported that the committee did not meet without academic representatives present. However, a couple of community committee respondents reported meeting on their own on a monthly basis and with all members, including academic representatives, on a quarterly basis.

Most respondents said that, on average, the percentage of community committee members who attended meetings ranged from 75% to 100%, and most said that representatives' commitment to participate was high. One respondent shared that high participation was especially true when community representatives had opportunities to provide input on current or prospective research. According to most respondents, community representatives' collective commitment was steady over time.

Community Committee Guidelines (Document Review)

Of the 35 overall community committees, 33 had written guidelines, and one PRC's overall community committee was in the process of developing guidelines when the document review was conducted. Thus, the evaluators reviewed 33 sets of guidelines to determine whether the guidelines included information on communication procedures, voting procedures, term commitments for committee chairs, and meeting attendance requirements (Table R-21).[‡] Six PRCs posted their guidelines on their Web sites, and three posted community committee meeting minutes.

Table R-21. Number and Percentage of Overall Community Committee Guidelines that Included Specific Elements (N = 33)

Element	Number (%)
Communication procedures	24 (73%)
• E-mail	7 (21%)
• Postal mail	6 (18%)
• Conference calls	3 (9%)
• Web site	5 (15%)
• In-person meetings	23 (70%)
• Other (e.g., newsletters)	3 (9%)
Voting procedures or amendments to the guidelines	17 (52%)
Term commitment for members	12 (36%)
Term commitment for committee chairs	17 (52%)
Term commitment for past committee chairs	7 (21%)
Meeting attendance requirements	17 (52%)

Source: Overall community committee guidelines.

[‡] Guidelines for other types of committees were not included in the document review.

Guidelines for Community Representative Input on Core Research (Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guide 3)

Interviews with community representatives provided information about guidelines that address community input on core research. Most respondents noted that their community committees had either formal and written or informal and unwritten guidelines that described how representatives should provide input. These guidelines outlined how multiple committees interact and defined their roles with regard to such tasks as reviewing or revising the current research agenda, being involved in PRC activities, or accepting new research opportunities. One respondent said,

[Guidelines] are used as a process in making decisions.... So, if someone were to e-mail me and say, "How do I get an abstract submitted, and what is the process for that?" then I can go to those guidelines and that's a starting place.

Some community committee respondents stated that the guidelines clearly outlined the purpose of different committees, how leadership should be established, when information was going to be disseminated, and whether a publication would result from the work. A few respondents said that their guidelines were being reviewed and revised. A couple of other respondents noted that being interviewed about the presence of governing guidelines prompted them to consider formalizing their informal, less detailed guidelines. One respondent, whose partnership did have guidelines, stated,

The guidelines for collaboration were very open and inclusive of community members doing as much as possible to keep them informed at all times and involved. But some of the specifics...like how long each member will be on...how to determine the leadership, those things are still in the process of evolving.

A couple of respondents said that the mission statement of the National Community Committee (NCC)[§] served as a set of governing principles in that it provided a general sense of what their PRC's community committee interest should be in the long term. The NCC comprises community representatives from each PRC's local community committee and is one of six subcommittees that help lead the PRC Program in setting standards and policies and in making recommendations for research and other program activities.²

A couple of respondents new to the core research project or the partnership did not know whether their PRCs had formal guidelines for community input. Also, a few community committee respondents noted that no formal orientation process occurred specifically on guidelines or principles for the partnership. One respondent, who reported that his or her PRC had guiding principles, said that the partners were confused about the extent and level of input expected from community committee members, and at what stage and in what capacity community committee members should provide input to the core research project. This sentiment was also expressed by a few other respondents whose partnerships did *not* have formal guidelines.

[§] "The National Community Committee is dedicated to helping build capacity in communities within local PRCs that were not traditionally involved in the planning, development, and evaluation of prevention research initiatives."³

Capacities of Community Committees (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

Academic respondents reported many examples of skills, resources, capacities, and assets that their community committees contributed to the core research project, evaluation, and training activities.

All respondents cited the same two examples of capacities. One was the community committee members' ability to facilitate trust of and community buy-in to research activities, including their ability to recruit research participants. The other was community committee members' effective communication with various community groups.

Most academic respondents also noted the following examples of the community committee members' capacity: conduct focus groups and develop and distribute surveys, disseminate results within the community, and increase the cultural relevance of programs, surveys, products, and materials.

Most academic respondents said that the community committee members' experience as long-term residents in the research community, and their access to venues for conducting the research, positively enhanced the core research projects. All academic respondents also described several specific resources provided by the partner community that affected research, such as providing a reliable knowledge base about the community culture and environment, sharing access to the community and its leaders, and offering access to a pool of potential employees.

Community Committee Respondents

Most community committee respondents noted that building relationships in the community and identifying or accessing the desired study population were among the most useful and significant skills that the community committee contributed to the core research project. The respondents provided additional examples of skills, some of which were similar to those described by the academic respondents:

- Assisting with focus group activities (e.g., recruitment).
- Disseminating information.
- Planning events.
- Assisting with designing programs and developing surveys, products, and materials that were culturally relevant to the community.
- Communicating the implications and findings of the research to the community, explaining the research purpose, and providing cultural sensitivity.

Community committee respondents also noted resources and experiences that members contributed to research. As did the academic respondents, all community committee participants stated that one of the community committee members' most valuable resources was their experience as long-term residents in the research community. One community committee respondent thought that the only valuable resource community committee members had to offer was their experience living in a low-income community. Most community respondents said that community committee representatives provided the following resources: access to venues, knowledge

of current events, understanding of the community culture and environment, and knowledge of local issues related to implementation of research in the community. Other resources mentioned by a few respondents included providing food to or incentives for research participants, devoting their personal (unpaid) time to the research, and providing access to leaders in the community who could serve as speakers and representatives during meetings or conferences led by the academic institution.

When asked to think beyond the community committee about resources the overall partner community provided to the PRC, similar to the academic respondents, almost all community committee respondents said the most valuable resource was the means to build relationships with individual people and different entities within the community. For example, a couple of respondents noted that community partners provided space or facilities for in-person partner meetings that occur in the community, reducing the cost burden to researchers. However, one respondent noted that the partner community did not have resources to provide to the PRC, stating, “Why would they?...We’re talking about the poorest population in the nation.” Other key resources that community committee respondents said partner communities provided include space for research activities, office space for PRC staff in the community, community member time to plan events and participate in research-related activities, and recruitment of research participants.

Types of Participation in Core Research by Community Committee Members and Key Partners

Community Committee Member Participation in Core Research (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

Almost all academic respondents reported that the community committee representatives were actively involved in the core research in some way. Only one respondent said the PRC was just beginning its research but expected the community to be involved. The respondents did not offer many examples of participation in the entire research process, noting that representatives seemed to be confident and comfortable about being involved in only specific steps of the research process. A couple of respondents said that representatives were involved in developing and implementing research, developing survey tools and materials, and interpreting and disseminating results. In these cases, the academic partners were responsible for data analysis and the initial interpretation of the data. The one respondent just beginning the core research project expected the community committee would provide space to carry out different aspects of research implementation. The same respondent said the PRC was not the “perfect model,” but that community committee members might be part of implementation, evaluation, and analysis.

Most academic respondents reported that their PRCs tried to ensure that community committee representatives provided input to the core research via informal and formal processes. Some of these processes included making sure that community committee representatives served as internal peer reviewers and that they were present throughout the institutional review board process. One respondent noted that the academic institution required researchers to inform community partners of any new projects under consideration before any such work could begin. Respondents also said that quarterly meetings took place as needed to keep community committee members informed about challenges to the core research project.

Some academic respondents noted that community committee representatives were active on research teams and present at all executive committee meetings, which were attended by all the PRC subcommittees' chairs or leaders. A few academic respondents also described holding formal meetings with the community committee representatives to review, revise, or update research objectives as well as to plan specific activities associated with each objective.

Community Committee Respondents

Like the academic respondents, most community committee respondents reported a high level of community committee involvement in the core research process except during data analysis. Most community committee respondents thought that the desire and commitment to be involved could be attributed to interest in the research project and concern that the intervention is implemented to their approval.

A couple of respondents said that community representatives were involved in developing and implementing the research; developing survey tools and materials; interpreting and disseminating data; and, to a much lesser extent, data analysis.

Key Partner Participation in Core Research (Academic Interview Respondents—Interview Guide 2)

Academic Respondents

The evaluation team asked academics about the involvement of PRCs' main partners, other than the community committee, in core research. Some respondents said their key partners contributed important resources to implementing the core research. These partners included community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, academia, health departments, schools, not-for-profit organizations, and hospitals. Members of these groups may or may not have served on the community committee, but some key partners contributed more to the core research than most community committee representatives.

Some respondents reported that key partners, specifically those not serving on a community committee, provided logistical support for a research project. Most respondents stated that key partners provided staff, resources, and technical skills related to producing materials (e.g., CD-ROMs, videos). Also, key partners acted as liaisons between the academic institution and the community, by relaying changes in the community that could affect the core research. One respondent commented that key partners worked solely behind the scenes as advisors and silent supporters of the mission and objectives of the research project. One respondent did not characterize any of the partners as key, saying instead that all partners played different and valuable roles on different committees and at different points in the research process.

Academic and Community Partners Engaging in CBPR

To conduct CBPR, academics and community members need to communicate about research projects. Challenges and conflicts can arise when working through concepts such as scientific rigor, community expectations, research timelines, and university-community history. This section describes the PRCs' experiences in balancing these issues.

Group Processes That Help or Hinder the Partnership (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

The academic respondents described challenges and conflicts for academic–community committee partnerships related to core research projects. A few respondents said the most difficult partnership challenges were related to research, specifically the nature and logistics of the work.

A couple of respondents noted that challenges occurred when core research project objectives might not be realized during the funding cycle. One respondent remarked,

How do we get the funding agencies to realize that...we're working hard here, even though it doesn't look like there is anything that's been done yet?

Another respondent said that although the partners were five years into the funding cycle they had just begun working on the core research because of changes to the research topic and objectives. A couple of respondents noted that research progress was challenged when partners disagreed about the research products or surveys slated for distribution in the community.

For most academic respondents, the most difficult challenges or conflicts were interpersonal. Some academic respondents described or alluded to interpersonal challenges related to ethnicity or race and due to an unintentional lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of academic members. As one respondent stated,

I think most of the conflicts...tend to be interpersonal—the hardest ones tend to be interpersonal. I think some of them...tend to be ethnic, racial related, a lack of sensitivity sometimes. And it's not maliciousness...it's an insidious kind of being unaware and insensitive.

Most academic respondents described the following facilitators: meeting frequently and having an agenda to address challenges and concerns, being patient, and insisting that a community representative be present at every executive or administrative committee meeting to ensure the involvement of multiple people in decision-making throughout the process.

When asked what methods were used to reach consensus and make decisions, some academic participants mentioned reviewing the bylaws of the PRC and community committee with all partners and meeting with all constituents to develop a strategy that considered all perspectives. Most academic respondents also mentioned the need to meet frequently and address conflicts or challenges as they occurred. One academic respondent stated,

...we've gone through conflicts before, [and] one of the things we realize is [that] face time is so critical. ...if there are conflicts or disagreements...one of the methods of resolving that is to spend more time in the community, to spend more time talking about our ideas to help each other understand where we're coming from.

Moreover, a few respondents reported that their respective partnerships operated on a consensus model and that, therefore, resolving conflict was a responsibility shared by the directors, program facilitators, community committee members, and the community liaison. However, most respondents said that the PRC director was often ultimately responsible for trying to resolve issues, challenges, or conflicts.

Community Committee Respondents

For most community committee respondents, most of the challenges or conflicts around core research projects were related to cultural differences. The partners had to acknowledge and overcome the differences between the academic culture and the community culture. Some community committee respondents said community partners had difficulty moving beyond their perception that the academic institutions seemed distanced from the community. One respondent offered,

I think that the universities in the beginning have certain aloofness...so you have to get through that. [Community representatives] needed the university to give up its being aloof and be welcoming to the community...and [for] the community committee...to be willing to hang in there and make it happen because if we had said "oh, they're too aloof," and we walked away, then [we] would both be losers. The community would [lose] university resources, programs, and educational opportunities...the university would lose...enriching their lives, enriching their programs, [and] the enrichment [of] knowing another group of people can give to the work that [they] do.

Also related to cultural differences, a few respondents said it took time to address and alleviate the community's distrust of research or even the mere mention of the word.

Other difficulties described by community committee respondents were related to factors beyond the researchers' or community partners' control. One respondent noted the difficulty of working with schools in a community where governmental politics affected the demographics and retention of the research population. For example, while conducting a study, a policy change resulted in some children from the project's study population being bused to different counties. The change affected the human and fiscal resources needed for the research. A couple of respondents described a challenge related to staffing in the community because of location (e.g., distance, rural setting), and a couple of other respondents noted difficulty tapping into the research population during specific times of the year (e.g., holidays).

Most respondents said that facilitators to working with universities included being open to learning from and about partners and being willing to change an approach slightly to meet everyone's needs. All respondents noted the following facilitators: increasing the number of informal meetings; sharing personal experiences; developing additional methods and modes for communication; and maintaining flexibility regarding activities, such as changing surveys, products, research protocols, or agendas. One respondent said that to help facilitate relationships, the partners developed an orientation packet describing the history and progress of the partnership and distributed it to people new to the project, especially academics.

Community committee respondents also described some methods used to reach consensus and make decisions, including bringing people on all sides of an issue together to discuss and address the problem in an open forum. Other methods included reviewing guidelines to ensure that the decision-making processes were clearly delineated and appealing to a board of directors who made decisions and brought the group to agreement.

Most respondents said that their partnerships operated on a top-down model, in which the PRC director was ultimately responsible for resolving issues, challenges, or conflicts. However, a few respondents said that, to resolve conflict, subcommittees were the first to provide recommendations to the full community committee. The community committee then would take the recommendations to a meeting with the academic partners at which all members would be present.

Some respondents stated that the party primarily responsible for resolving conflicts depended on the problem; as one respondent said,

I think if it's an issue that has to do with the science...then there's no question that...our principal investigator and our deputy director...guide our process. But if the issue is more related to something with the research and the gathering of the [data], we pretty much offer our own ideas for how to resolve the issues and then work that out with the [academic partners].

Another person said that community committee members tended to work with the lead person on the intervention (not the PRC director) in addressing conflicts during small working group sessions. This person noted,

It's interesting though, when we end up at...an advisory meeting and the director is there, we tend to go to the director [to resolve conflicts]. But I'd say more of the day-to-day work is the lead person that we're meeting with.

A few respondents were hesitant to characterize their difficulties or challenges as conflicts because they felt that conflict was too strong of a word. One respondent stated,

I think everybody's goal [is] the same, but I don't think everybody agrees on how to get there.

Discussing Scientific Rigor with Community Partners (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

Academic respondents were asked whether and how the partners had discussed the need for scientific rigor in the core research. Most respondents stated that the topic had been discussed, especially to ensure that appropriate methods were used to carry out the research. These discussions usually occurred over a series of meetings or retreats. One academic representative reported benefits of discussions:

I think we have learned through discussion around research...why/how it can be valuable to design core research proposals...together. That definitely had an obvious and immediate positive impact. In our case...you design it with [the community], explaining the rigor, the need for it, explaining case-controlled design, for example. It is an opportunity to educate on research design. And so, that's worked very well.

A couple of respondents noted that the academics sometimes needed a creative research design to facilitate a process that would soon benefit the community while maintaining the rigor of the research. One respondent noted that as a result of discussions on scientific rigor, the academics realized the benefit of engaging community partners throughout the research process to avoid the need to revamp the research design, content, and language of products used in the community. Another respondent noted the importance of,

Thinking about how you do research and in as rigorous a way as possible, while also maintaining the integrity of what the community cares about...

One respondent noted tension between academic and community partners when the community did not accept the need for a control group and forced the academics to consider alternatives. The community did not want people to receive nothing for their involvement in a study, no matter the reason. According to one respondent, academic partners must think of ways to think creatively about comparison groups.

Community Committee Respondents

Most community committee respondents said that their PRCs had discussed scientific rigor (either formally or informally) in addressing the approach to the core research projects. One respondent remarked,

I think the PRC has been clear about the guidelines they have to follow...they're real aggressive about that, being true to the evaluation process [and] the guidelines they have to operate in. And I think they've done a much better job of explaining that so that partners can understand what [is] needed.

A couple of respondents commented that a fair amount of this discussion occurred during the early stages in the research process, such as during the design of the study. One respondent shared the following:

In the [community committee] meetings, there are university updates...going over the research tool, why certain things are asked a certain way, what they're using in getting it started. And as there have been suggestions that have come up at inappropriate times, to change the tool, that's been brought to the table and...they explain why changes are not going to be made at this time.

Some respondents said that to maintain scientific rigor, academic partners had put forth the effort to involve the community in every step of the research process by getting feedback and openly sharing information. The representatives said they preferred to be involved in this way, rather than having the academic representatives implement all or parts of the study and then seek community members' feedback afterward.

Learning Through Community Involvement in Research (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

All academic respondents said both academic and community partners learned something as they engaged in the research together. Most respondents reported that the academic members learned, and continue to learn, how to talk about research in the community without offending community members or calling to mind negative historical associations related to research in underserved communities. A few respondents noted that they learned what it truly meant to be participatory. One respondent stated,

We've learned how to better involve the community in all steps of the process, from kind of talking through research design to talking through...the instrumentation and getting community input on that too.... We're not just interested in getting an academic paper and publishing...we really are...wanting to help build the resources and the capacity of the community.

A few respondents commented on the importance of acknowledging the presence, impact, and role of racial issues, subtle racism, and historical factors in research. Individual respondents stated that academic partners learned how to keep research rigorous while honoring community concerns and interests; that effective and frequent communication facilitates trust and understanding; to be aware of, and sensitive to, other cultural experiences and perspectives; and to enhance the involvement of the community throughout the research process. One respondent learned about time:

I think I've learned a little bit about the idea that maybe we need to go a little slower sometimes...but especially when you are interacting with people who are different than you on [many] different levels.

Most academic respondents believed that the community had learned about and learned to accept the academic culture, the research process, and how the research products could benefit the community. A few respondents noted that the community saw academic researchers who were committed to improving the health and development of the community. One academic respondent stated that the community partners learned how to take advantage of the resources of the academic institution by contributing community skills and resources that benefited the institution. Some academic respondents believed the community and its constituents enhanced their self-efficacy, confidence, and voice within the partnership.

Community Committee Respondents

All community committee respondents stated that both community and academic partners learned throughout the research process. Most of these respondents spoke of cultural exchange between the parties. As one respondent described,

It's a different world...they're urban, we're rural...it is different... even as it comes to food... There were times where we did a meeting in our community... and they served bagels, and [some community] people had never eaten bagels before. Bagels. And those are things that we would never get to experience if it hadn't been for a reason to get together.

Most respondents believed the academic partners learned about interpersonal and cultural factors. The academics learned to be receptive to collaboration with community groups, to be open to input (e.g., revising research tools to suit community needs), and to value the community's experiences and perspectives as valid and integral to enhancing the applicability and scientific rigor of the research. One respondent said that saying, "I am challenging the process and not the personalities," was a way to approach collaboration to facilitate learning between community and academic partners.

According to a few respondents, community representatives learned that the researchers were committed to improving the health and development of the community. For example, one respondent stated,

The community has learned that everybody who is in a university isn't a stuffed shirt...I like to think that the people at the university and some of the other partners have learned to be more welcoming of the opportunity to partner with community groups. You can get to have a working relationship with...institutions in your community that [have] resources to offer the community...so it's a win-win situation.

A few respondents also said community representatives learned that patience is the key to seeing research through to completion—that research takes time and is fundamentally about relationships. The respondents also remarked that community representatives noticed how communities benefited from capacity-building efforts. One respondent stated that members now take a more confident, self-efficacious role in the early stages of the research, and this respondent viewed this change as a direct result of the exchange of information between the academic and community partners. Respondents also said they learned to leverage community resources in return for resources of the academic institution and to appreciate that research can positively affect the community.

Community Involvement in the PRCs' Research Over Time

Changes in Core Research Due to Community Involvement (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

The evaluators asked academic respondents to describe how core research changed over time because of the community's involvement. Most respondents reported that their access to the research population had increased, and some noted that the research was more beneficial and translatable to the community. Some respondents said the research was more community-driven and less academically driven. Most academic representatives described community involvement in the core research as highly participatory, scientifically rigorous, and often driven by the community and supported by the academic institution.

Community Committee Respondents

Some community committee respondents said that the partners had to make changes to initial data collection instruments because they were too long, the questions were too broad, or some of the wording was inappropriate for the study population. A couple of other respondents who worked in schools noted that they had to eliminate some measures from a survey that “started some uproar” in the community. A couple of respondents said they could not answer this question because the core research project was just beginning.

Evolution of Community Involvement in the PRCs' Research (Academic and Community Committee Interview Respondents—Interview Guides 2 and 3)

Academic Respondents

Most academic respondents reported an overall increase in community involvement in various research endeavors over time. A few respondents described community involvement as having become more participatory, hands-on, and equal to the involvement of the academic partners. A few academic respondents noted that the community had taken on more self-directed, autonomous roles throughout the research process. One respondent noted that,

Some projects are driven by the community and [the academics] just help them. So it's... their idea and we just help them develop an evaluation plan, and so then they are more involved than we are.

When asked about the reason for the change in community involvement, a couple of respondents stated that it was the academics' need to make the research relevant and acceptable to the community and the community's desire to be included. A few respondents stated that encouraging community members to provide input and to take on particular roles (e.g., by hiring them as health advocates or data collectors) also increased community involvement. One academic

respondent stated that the community's insistence on becoming a full partner contributed to the increase in involvement. According to this respondent, the community members learned to use their skills, resources, and experiences to take advantage of the resources of the academic institution.

According to a few respondents, the increase in community involvement could also be attributed to the amount of time spent building relationships and rapport between the academic and community partners. One respondent said the change was originally driven by the community, and then the academic institution began to recognize the benefit of community involvement in research. Another respondent commented on the benefits community involvement can bring to the university and the researchers:

[Academics] understand there's value in giving back to the community for the university. And they also understand the value that it helps bring in other grant money and eventually publications are happening, and we are on the map in other ways because of it.

Most academic respondents also noted that the increase in involvement was due to increased community confidence in the community members' own skills, abilities, and capacities. Only one respondent stated that the change in community involvement was driven primarily by the academic institution.

All academic respondents indicated that the level of community involvement was determined by the type of research or when it was conducted. One respondent said the community members tended to become more involved when they were the ones primarily running a project (with some academic institution assistance) such as developing an evaluation plan or analyzing data. A couple of respondents stated that community involvement depended on where the project was in the research process; for example, one respondent said that the community was more involved during recruitment and survey design than during analysis and report writing.

Another academic respondent noted that the community wanted to be involved in intervention research and activities that occurred in the community instead of analytic aspects of research, such as quantitative analysis. A few respondents also reported that community partners tended to be more welcoming of, and therefore more involved in, research when a needed health service was provided while the research was conducted (e.g., offering a type of free health care along with taking blood samples for research data). One respondent noted that the community became less involved during secondary analysis of large national data sets. The reason offered was that such research did not require intense involvement from the community, whereas ongoing research occurring locally required community members to be active.

Academic respondents noted that the community tended to be more involved in research when they could see the immediate benefits of the intervention or program, such as identifiable changes in the community. One respondent stated,

[The communities] understand and appreciate the need for data and evidence-based work... but...what motivates them is that they want to be involved in creating a better community.

Most academic respondents reported that the academics' commitment to involving the community in research had increased, and they described this as a positive change. A couple of respondents noted that increasing communication and building trust helped mediate initial clashes between academic and community cultures. One such culture clash mentioned by some of the academic respondents was that of timing and deadlines. For example, one respondent shared the following:

In the university culture in which we operate, when it takes a long time to get some of this [community-based work] done, that's inconsistent with us having to crank out publications and do our research.

This academic respondent indicated that community members expected researchers to set aside enough time to keep the community partners actively involved throughout the project, irrespective of deadlines.

Another respondent noted that some academics were initially afraid of interacting with the community. Once they got over their fear and began working with community members, however, their appreciation for the community's contributions increased. Thus, because of an increase in the learning that had occurred for the academic partners, they remained steadfast in their commitment to including the community in research.

Community Committee Respondents

Most community committee respondents reported an increase in involvement over time and described the research as an ongoing, collaborative process. According to a few respondents, the increased involvement could be attributed to the amount of time spent facilitating trust between the partners as well as enhancing the community's understanding of the benefits and processes of research. One respondent said,

We had a lot of that in the beginning...from the days of distrust, [us asking] 'You're going to do research? What kind of research? What kind of questions are you asking and who are you giving it to?' But then we got to know that the questions were...not information that would identify anyone or that it was not something designed to be negative....

Most respondents also shared the sentiment of one respondent, who stated,

I think that the participation on the part of the community has increased.... We went from sort of being spoon-fed information to being full partners.... Full participation meant not just looking at and commenting on a program that's designed or a research project that is already designed, but actually making input into...them.

Some community committee respondents noted that community involvement was dependent on where the project was in the research process. A few respondents noted that their communities wanted to be involved when they could have direct input into the intervention strategies selected and how the research was implemented. One respondent said his community representatives tended to be more involved when they assumed full responsibility for significant tasks in the research process.

Most community committee respondents described a positive change: an increase in the academics' commitment to involving the community in research. A couple of respondents also noted that increased communication and trust-building helped to enhance and nurture the academic commitment to involving the community in core research activities.

Perceived Benefits and Challenges Associated With Being in the PRC Network, as Viewed by Academic Representatives (Interview Guide 4)

Benefits of Being in the PRC Network

Academic respondents unanimously described their PRCs' participation in the national PRC network as a benefit. Almost all respondents agreed that PRCs' collaboration and interaction with each other—both across centers and disciplines—was a vital aspect of the national partnership. The benefit respondents most often cited was the pooling of expertise. In some cases, the sharing of expertise was described as filling specific gaps on core or other research projects, as explained by one respondent:

... we have a collaboration with a study that's a three-[PRC] study...and we're covering a broad range of risk factors for kids. And so, our [PRC] doesn't have expertise in every area, but we're collaborating with two other [PRCs]. And so, within the three [PRCs], that covers the areas of expertise.

Other respondents described a knowledge base through which the PRC network supports and advances the field of prevention research. One respondent referred to the PRC network as a "national brain trust":

...academia is an information-based enterprise, and this access to a national brain trust... facilitates good work, the adoption of best practices, and exchange of innovations that we all find very helpful. I certainly do.

Respondents also cited practical advantages to participation in the PRC network. Most respondents discussed the benefits of collaboration on research grants, professional networking opportunities—especially through participation in the thematic research networks, and access to different structural or organizational models from which to draw. With regard to this last benefit, one respondent noted,

The difficulty in developing...a PRC within a school of public health is that we frequently don't have good models for how to structure the administrative processes and/or administrative organization. So, another benefit is understanding...how other PRCs are operating and what issues they deal with and how they address them.

This respondent, from a comparatively recently funded PRC, also mentioned the benefit of being able to turn to the PRC network for the experience and expertise of older PRCs that had dealt with issues similar to its issues. Some respondents also made this point with regard to models for working with communities, noting that the way other centers conducted CBPR and worked with community partners served as examples. One respondent thought that partnership examples were one of the most valuable aspects of involvement in the national network:

One of the greatest things that happens is just our regular gatherings where you find out what people are doing in detail and see how they're working with their community partners, and you just get a lot of ideas about different ways of working with your community partners, of developing projects, of implementing things, disseminating things.

Respondents saw the PRC network's funding mechanism as an advantage, noting that CBPR could be a slow and difficult process and that very few funders reliably supported this type of research. A few respondents saw the PRC network's 5-year funding cycle as recognition and

understanding of CBPR. One respondent went further to say that it was precisely the PRC Program office's understanding of the importance and nature of CBPR that enabled the PRCs to conduct this type of research, noting that the long-term core funding facilitated the development of partnerships between research centers and their communities. The long-term funding helped create an environment in which communities could have confidence that researchers would be with them on a long-term basis and an environment in which researchers could focus on the community rather than having to find funding every one or two years and then move to a new project or community.

A few respondents noted that an additional benefit of participation in the national program was the status gained for their centers from their association with the PRC network. These respondents said that membership in the PRC network afforded them some measure of validation for the type of research they conduct.

Challenges of Being in the PRC Network

The challenge most frequently expressed was the administrative aspects associated with being a PRC. Most respondents said the reporting requirements related to the PRC information system and their attempts to comply with a "one size fits all" standard were difficult. A few respondents noted, however, that the requirements were not unexpected, acknowledging that "all money comes with some strings attached."

Respondents also described the challenge of insufficient funding. Most respondents thought that their core awards were inadequate to realistically meet the expectations of the funding announcement. A few respondents noted that funding had not kept pace with inflation, nor had it matched the amount of funding originally intended for individual PRCs. Respondents believed that these perceived shortages could disproportionately affect PRCs that could not effectively attract funds beyond the core funding (i.e., through special interest projects or other external grants) and that such shortages were particularly challenging to PRCs that did not have sufficient infrastructure or institutional support to compete with other PRCs for additional funding. One respondent said that these perceived shortages seemed to have posed a challenge to obtaining additional funding and increasing capacity; this had been difficult for the PRC to overcome.

A related issue mentioned by respondents from new PRCs was initial mistrust of them by PRCs who saw their addition as a challenge to the overall availability of funds. However, these respondents said that mistrust quickly subsided once the new PRCs became integrated into the network and effectively became "part of the family."

Two other funding-related challenges cited by a couple of respondents included insufficient funds to take full advantage of networking opportunities within the PRC network and insufficient personnel resources for administrative support.

Respondents also noted that some challenges went hand in hand with benefits—particularly collaboration among the PRCs. Some respondents talked about the operational challenges and hazards of cross-PRC collaboration; trying to convene groups or facilitate long-distance communication could be cumbersome and inefficient, especially for the thematic research networks. One respondent recommended increased efforts and support to facilitate communication across the network. Although they highlighted collaboration and communication as challenges, most respondents said that they still viewed these areas as benefits.

Benefits of and Challenges to Core Research

Respondents did not differentiate much between benefits to their PRCs from participation in the PRC network and benefits to their core research. However, the few respondents who did mention benefits specific to their core research emphasized the following: collaboration among PRCs, access to outside expertise that directly benefited the core research, and the sharing of best practices among PRCs on both methodology and subject matter.

A few respondents said that funding for their core research simply would not exist were it not for the PRC Program and that the program's emphasis on funding innovative CBPR gave researchers the opportunity to pursue topics and methods that would otherwise be hard to get funded.

Isolation was the challenge to the core research most commonly cited. Some respondents stated that their core research was isolated from other work being done across the PRC network and that they were, therefore, unable to learn from others about their subject matter, population, or methodology. Respondents also found a lack of resources for getting assistance from outside experts or advisors. One respondent described the difficulties faced in working with the community and thought that the core research suffered from a lack of guidance or even official guidelines on how to engage a particular community. Questions that arose from this experience included what to do when community goals and the goals of the CDC differed and how to report potentially sensitive or disconcerting data to community partners, such as negative evaluation results.

Another challenge that a few respondents mentioned was trying to balance core research needs with other activities resulting from engagement in the PRC network. Some respondents said that participation in networking and collaborative activities (such as thematic research networks, SIPs, meetings, travel, or reporting) sometimes drew resources and attention away from the core research.

One respondent described struggling with the impression that CBPR was perceived and applied differently across PRCs and was still a work in progress. In the words of this respondent,

I think the single thing that does stand out is the core research project is...the flagship venture of each PRC, and therefore most recognizable as a representation of what we stand for. And what we stand for is community-based participatory research, [therefore] the criteria defining CBPR becomes extremely important there. And one of the challenges in applying those criteria is that they must be embraced by this very diverse national network. And frankly, those defining criteria for the very things PRCs are supposed to be about are still a work in progress.

Benefits of and Challenges to Individual Researchers

Most respondents said that the PRC network gave them opportunities for professional development, including strengthening their research skills and widening their experience through collaboration with other researchers and PRCs.

A couple of respondents said their involvement in the PRC network increased their understanding of public health, how other academic institutions and public health institutions operated, and ultimately, how they and their research contributions fit into the field.

A few respondents talked about professional advancement by their involvement in PRC activities and the benefit of acquiring knowledge, expertise, leadership experience, and learning of potential funding sources. For example, one respondent shared,

[That] working with folks at CDC...and the missions that the PRC Program office has taken on...are so consistent with my professional values...I can't even put it into words. And it's impacted my skill level, but also I would say confidence. It's had a big impact on my confidence as a leader. Working with, being mentored by some wonderful leaders has...impacted me more in terms of leadership than it has in terms of research.

A couple of respondents noted that the PRC Program funds pilot research that otherwise might not get funded. Respondents mentioned that pilot studies allowed researchers to pursue new subject areas, publish journal articles, and develop relationships with communities. One respondent referred to the core research as a springboard for his or her career. A few respondents described the personal gratification they gained from working with communities, and they noted how valuable it was to them as researchers to stay true to their own core principles and beliefs.

In terms of challenges, respondents consistently identified the administrative and bureaucratic burdens associated with being a PRC as the biggest challenge. Most respondents thought that their time and energy were disproportionately consumed by these responsibilities, which prevented them, in some cases, from being more involved in rigorous research. One respondent described his role as having changed from conducting research to attending meetings and becoming more or less an administrator. A few respondents also found that the time spent on collaborative activities with other PRCs was overly burdensome and compromised their ability to focus on their own research.

Some respondents reported that they did not perceive any challenges to their involvement in the PRC network.

Benefits of and Challenges to Academic Institutions

Academic respondents made several observations regarding the benefits to academic institutions involved in the PRC network. Specifically, several respondents mentioned the tension that has existed between academic institutions (or researchers) and communities, and they commented that housing a PRC provided an opportunity to address and alleviate that tension and to establish or rebuild trust that might have been damaged in the past. As one respondent observed,

The PRC network is a great tangible manifestation of that commitment to atone for the transgressions of the past. So, it provides infrastructure to do the right thing and the productive thing, to really advance the agenda of public health as well as to embrace the new philosophy about what public health research should look like.

Many respondents saw the PRCs as an advantage to the academic institutions' public relations. They stated that being part of the PRC network provided their academic institution with some prestige. The PRC also provided opportunities to work with communities and an avenue to contribute to the "new age of public health" and the development of the participatory research field.

Some respondents stated that housing a PRC generally provided an additional source of revenue to an academic institution through the leveraging and procurement of additional research dollars. A few respondents noted that academic institutions and schools of public health benefited from the enhanced capacity to conduct CBPR and from the connections established with other PRCs.

Respondents mentioned a few potential challenges to academic institutions housing a PRC, including the potential financial burden that a PRC might impose. This burden could stem from insufficient funding by the PRC Program, a lack of PRC capacity to obtain additional funding,

or administrative costs. In some cases, an academic institution was expected to “pick up the slack” and help fund the PRC when a funding shortage occurred or when the PRC was burdened by administrative duties, reporting, and budgeting. Thus, the challenges were to both the academic institution and the PRC.

Benefits of and Challenges to the Development of Additional Research

All respondents reported that the PRC network contributed to the development of additional research. They thought that the PRC Program was important to the development of new models of CBPR by allowing for both long-term projects and pilot research and by encouraging new research through thematic research networks and other SIPs. One respondent described the PRCs as having a friendly, competitive atmosphere that increased the expectation for innovation and quality research.

The only challenge to additional research reported related to funding shortages. A few respondents mentioned that limited funds did not allow for continuing some PRC research beyond the pilot phase. However, most respondents could not think of any ways in which the development of additional research was hindered by the PRC network, and in fact, they thought that such development was helped by the network.

Perceived Benefits and Challenges Associated With Being in the PRC Network and in the PRC’s National Community Committee, as Viewed by Community Committee Respondents (Interview Guide 5)

All respondents for this topic are members of the PRC’s National Community Committee (NCC).

Degree of Interaction

The respondents reported varying degrees of interaction with other PRCs. A couple of the respondents said they had interacted with only one other PRC each year, and some respondents reported interacting in some capacity with all 33 PRCs each year. The types of interaction included electronic communication (e.g., e-mail, information on PRCs’ Web sites), conference calls, and in-person meetings. Some respondents reported participating in monthly or quarterly meetings of the NCC either in person or via conference calls. A few respondents discussed attending retreats and regional functions. Affiliation with the NCC resulted in most respondents participating in NCC-related activities and attending annual meetings. Some respondents reported that participation in the NCC entailed frequent interaction with other PRCs.

Benefits of and Challenges to the Community of Being in the PRC Network

All respondents thought that they benefited from and learned from their participation in the PRC network. Some respondents stated that they developed an awareness and understanding of the mission of the PRC Program. A couple of respondents gained an appreciation for the effort required to build partnerships and educate a community about health issues. Respondents also said that the opportunity to learn from and about the backgrounds and experiences of others in the PRC network was important. As one respondent noted,

Just being able to appreciate the differences and really getting to the place where you understand that your way is not the only way, and not necessarily the best way, is important.

Respondents enjoyed learning about CBPR and thought that learning about participatory research was an important piece of knowledge acquired through their involvement in the PRC network.

One community respondent said:

I've gained a better understanding of CBPR and a better understanding of my role as a community member in helping to shape and mold what that community participatory research looks like in my community.

One respondent said that CBPR would not continue without a CDC mandate to use the methodology.

Respondents thought that communities benefited from the PRCs' research agendas and the dissemination of products developed through the PRCs' research projects. A few respondents said the most common community benefit was the relationships established between the PRC network and the communities. Another benefit expressed by a few respondents was the exposure to research, the research process, and the exchange of ideas between researchers and community members. One respondent, talking about the NCC, stated,

When new members come...they're not quite sure what's happening or what [the NCC] is all about. But as they become more and more familiar with it, they can see the benefit of being a part of this group, not only with their own project but also the chance to have input to what's happening on a national level.

A couple of respondents talked about the ability to leverage the community's resources for the needs of the academic institution and vice versa. A couple of respondents also noted the benefit of an increased capacity to obtain grant funds for other community health needs as a result of interacting with PRC researchers.

Regarding challenges, one respondent said a challenge for the community was attempting to stay involved and have time to devote to PRC-related issues and projects. Another challenge was the scientific language used by the researchers. A couple of the respondents described the learning curve necessary to understand the research process, and one described how communicating about research at a level understood by the community members could be challenging.

A challenge is the complexity of the research and how do we bring that down to sort of a talking point for the community.

Benefits of and Challenges to Community Involvement in PRC Research

Community members described benefits to the research projects from involvement in the PRC network. A few respondents noted that being able to bring resources from the community to the projects was helpful. One example shared was of a community representative who was able to work with an employer to submit a grant to support some of the PRC's research. Another benefit noted was the exchange of ideas between researchers and practitioners.

One respondent stated there were no challenges to the research as a result of community involvement, while some respondents said that funding was a major challenge. One respondent thought that funding had not caught up with the practice of CBPR, and another thought that not enough money was available for special trainings or community projects.

A few respondents noted that trust was a challenge particularly when community members are unable to see benefits from participation due to the lack of immediate change. One community respondent explained,

I think the challenges are in people understanding what they're doing, that it's not going to take away from the community, that it's not going to hurt the community.

A few community respondents stated that a challenge was uncertainty about whether the resources should reside with the academic institution or the community. A few respondents stated that obtaining researchers' buy-in to work collaboratively with community representatives presented a challenge.

Overall, community representatives believed that community involvement in the PRC network made a substantial positive change to the research projects. Most respondents mentioned that the most important changes stemmed from informing the researchers about what is important to the community. A couple of respondents thought that changes to the research projects included focusing on CBPR, increasing the engagement and involvement of community members, and sharing information with and learning from other PRCs.

Benefits of and Challenges to Community Involvement in the Development of Additional Research

Most respondents stated that additional research was developed at their PRCs as a result of community involvement in the PRC network. A few respondents mentioned that because community representatives were affiliated with the PRC, they were eligible to apply for SIPs.

A few respondents did not think that involvement in the PRC network hindered development of additional research. However, one respondent said that the background work and needs assessments required to propose a research project would be extensive and time-consuming and could hinder the desire to develop additional research. A few respondents discussed the community demand for research and the resulting difficulty of responding to all the community's needs. One respondent stated,

At the end of the day, the reality is [that] the high demand for the research to be done and disseminated back into the community cannot be met.

Community respondents talked about how additional research was beneficial to the community. They stated that the increase in community research generated partnerships, grant opportunities, and other research projects. Community representatives noted the development of additional research also provided more opportunities to learn from the work that other PRCs were involved in and increased resource-sharing between the community and the PRC.

Benefits of and Challenges to Community Involvement in Community Relationships

Relationship-building between community members and the PRC researchers is an ongoing effort. All respondents thought that the relationships between their communities and academic institutions strengthened over time as a result of the community's involvement in the PRC network. Most respondents said the greatest change in regard to relationship-building was the continued development of an open and involved relationship among the academic members of the PRC, the community representatives, and the community as a whole. One respondent said,

It really is like a family. You ask about their grandkids. You know about the rest of their lives aside from work.

Other specific examples of benefits the respondents shared included expanded partnerships with a collaborative perspective, improved relationships, and enhanced trust.

Regarding challenges, one respondent mentioned that the initial lack of trust between the partners made it difficult to work together. A few respondents said that keeping motivated throughout the research process is sometimes difficult, particularly when progress is slow. Another challenge stated was negotiating dissemination strategies between community representatives and researchers.

Benefits of and Challenges to Involvement in the National Community Committee

One benefit of NCC involvement expressed by a few respondents was the comfortable relationships established among the NCC representatives and the PRC researchers. A few community representatives noted valuing the evaluation and research abilities of the researchers. A couple of respondents spoke about the opportunity for growth both personally and for their community organizations. Some respondents cited the opportunity to gain knowledge of national research and then pass those opportunities on to their communities.

For most respondents, the challenges of NCC involvement concerned funding—particularly trying to take advantage of funding opportunities given that they thought they lacked knowledge of how to successfully pursue research funding. Other challenges expressed by some respondents were dealing with competing priorities, meeting communication demands, and keeping people engaged in multiple, time-consuming projects. One respondent did not see any challenges as a result of being involved in the NCC.

The respondents also discussed benefits experienced by other people in the community as a result of the NCC's work. A couple of respondents mentioned access to nationwide research, training, networks, and collaborative activities. Other benefits to the community included the building of relationships and the leveraging of PRC resources. The challenges mentioned included rewording scientific information so that community members could understand it. They also expressed the challenge to communities of staying involved in the research of PRCs—both in terms of interest and time.

Academic–Community Partner Interaction Study

Discussion

This section discusses five overarching topics identified through the study: (1) community committees and guidelines, (2) learning from the process of CBPR, and (3) benefits and challenges of being in the PRC network.

Community Committees and Guidelines

- PRCs varied greatly by the number of community committees they had and by individual committees' structure, role, and level of involvement in PRC activities. Some community committees included subcommittees, and others represented a perspective other than that of the partner community (e.g., some PRCs have scientific advisory committees).
- The evaluators did not find a consistent level of detail on the committees other than the overall community committees, which did not allow a full description and comparison of all committees across PRCs.
- Agreed-upon fundamental principles, processes, and objectives were important to developing and nurturing successful partnerships.³ Nearly all PRCs had formal, written guidelines for collaboration with their overall community committee.
 - Communication procedures, voting procedures, term commitments, and meeting attendance requirements were the most common elements included in the guidelines reviewed, and were present in 46% to 65% of the guidelines.
 - Some guidelines also included information on the timing and duration of meetings, the structures in place to facilitate feedback by members, the persons expected to be part of the partnership or committee, and an election process for committee chairs. Other topics included roles and responsibilities, the way leadership is established, and the timing of information dissemination.
 - The partners frequently had community meetings during which guidelines or principles of interaction were reviewed or discussed, which suggests that open communication was a priority. This priority was cited as a key principle by the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health board of directors.⁴
 - Guidelines, either explicit or implicit, were part of an organization's structure or culture.⁵ The PRCs' community partnerships were at different stages of development, and new community committee representatives did not always know about formal, explicit guidelines describing how they could provide input to the core research. Nevertheless, these respondents reported understanding how to give input and make decisions related to the core projects.

Recommendations

Macro has four main recommendations concerning community committees:

- Further evaluation, particularly an in-depth examination across all PRCs, would be needed to fully describe the breadth, structure, and role of committees at all PRCs. Such a review would provide in-depth information on the activities in which the committees are involved, the mechanisms or structures in place to facilitate involvement, and the level of involvement in activities.

- PRCs should share committee guidelines with new community and academic partners as part of an orientation process.
- The PRC Program office, in collaboration with the PRCs and the National Community Committee, could develop recommendations for PRCs on elements to include in the guidelines that established PRCs find helpful.
- PRCs should be encouraged to share their guidelines with each other to facilitate learning from each other's experience.

Learning from the Process of CBPR

This study explored various aspects and processes of CBPR at PRCs that facilitated research. Issues included scientific rigor, culture and context, trust, capacities of communities in CBPR, and changing perspectives over time.

Research and Scientific Rigor

Respondents reported that time spent explaining research terms and concepts as well as steps of the research process was important to community committee members' understanding of the project and to enhancing their capacity to provide meaningful input.

- Community members who were informed and involved throughout the research process tended to understand the importance of and necessity for certain steps and generally support the research protocol and agenda. They could convey this information to the broad community in a meaningful way.
- Community committee members tended to provide the most input when the study was an intervention design because they could contribute to survey development, data collection, and dissemination of results, and they could see the results of their efforts.
- Some discussions of scientific rigor were difficult when community committee representatives did not have experience with research design and evaluation. The discussions included explanation of research terminology, such as randomized trial and research incentives. Respondents said that some research practices, such as not offering an intervention to participants in a control group, were unacceptable to community members and that researchers had to consider alternatives.
- These discussions were time consuming and, at some PRCs, could contribute to delay in the development and implementation of research designs that are scientifically rigorous and agreeable to all partners. Such delays could contribute to a project not to be completed within a funding cycle.
- Discussion should occur early in the partnership, while objectives are being laid out, so that progress will not be impeded and various pitfalls can be avoided.

Culture and Context

Both the community and academic representatives must understand each other's culture to facilitate the research.

- Interpersonal relationships helped both community and academic partners understand and appreciate each other's culture and ways of getting things done, but they could also be a source of tension, conflict, or challenge.
- Community committee respondents described needing to acknowledge and overcome the differences between the university culture and the community culture. They learned about the research process, that presenting data and publishing results were necessary to research, and that the results could benefit their community.
- Both community and academic respondents said that informal meetings, frequent communication, and sharing personal experiences contributed to the partnership, particularly in repairing damage from past research in the community.

Trust

Both academic and community respondents repeatedly mentioned trust as important to the partnerships and agreed that building trust requires time and dedication.

- Respondents said frequent meetings and other opportunities to interact helped build trust.
- Respondents said that community committees facilitated trust between the overall community and the researchers.
- Academic respondents reported their appreciation for the PRC Program's 5-year funding cycles, which afforded them the time to build the trust essential to successful CBPR.

Capacities of Communities in CBPR

Both academic and community respondents described similar resources and assets that community members brought to the PRC and the research project, including

- Facilitating communication between academics and community groups.
- Facilitating trust or buy-in of the research agenda as it relates to the community-at-large.
- Providing critical input on the development of culturally sensitive and relevant materials.

Community members also provide practical resources to the PRC, including venues for meetings, organizational skills, and personal or unpaid time to be involved in research activities.

Changing Perspectives Over Time

Most academic and community respondents noted that in the beginning of their partnerships, community representatives were skeptical of community research.

- Over time, community members' understanding of research and scientific rigor increased, which reduced their initial frustration or fear of research.
- Ongoing discussions, opportunities for input and collaboration, and interactions with the researchers helped community representatives become open to and comfortable with research, working with academics, and the length of time quality research takes.
- Researchers gained an appreciation for the value of community input to research.

Recommendations

- Academic partners need to be patient when explaining the terminology and steps of the research process to community committee representatives or the community at large.
- Academic and community partners must discuss their respective cultures at the beginning of the study design and remain open-minded about the importance of scientific rigor throughout the research process.
- Community partners should be involved early and frequently in the research to help ensure it proceeds in a timely manner.
- The academic and community partners are in a unique position to share lessons learned. Future activities could include developing tools on how to educate community partners on research concepts and academics on cultural sensitivity.

Benefits and Challenges of Being in the PRC Network

Both researchers and community committee members discussed benefits and challenges to being part of the PRC Program.

Benefits

- Both academic and community committee respondents believed that membership elevated the status of the centers and communities among their peers.
- Academic respondents appreciated the PRC Program's commitment to CBPR and their own ability to collaborate with researchers across the PRC network.
- Community committee respondents appreciated their increased knowledge about research and improved capacity to pursue other resources from academic institutions.

Challenges

- Academic respondents were challenged by administrative aspects associated with being a PRC and inadequate core funding awards for realistically meeting the expectations of the funding announcement. Funding issues could limit PRCs' ability to fully implement the research or other activities originally planned or desired, take full advantage of PRC networking opportunities (such as working with other PRCs on SIPs), or hire sufficient personnel.
- Community committee respondents were challenged by the level of commitment required. For many community members, involvement was voluntary and above and beyond their actual jobs. In many cases, members received little or no compensation for their service.

Recommendations

Academic respondents provided suggestions for the PRC Program office on funding guidance, development of tools, and increased opportunities for networking across the PRCs. Macro agrees with these suggestions.

- Provide guidance related to funding and allocation of resources, specifically on the percentage of the award that might be applied toward administrative aspects of the PRCs' work.
- Develop tools or templates to help PRCs become efficient with administrative tasks such as entering data into the IS.

- Establish sessions during national meetings that emphasize interaction and the exchange of ideas among participants (as opposed to presentations) as well as other mechanisms for sharing throughout the year, such as Web conferences.
- Support or develop mechanisms that facilitate communication across the network.

Community respondents also provided a suggestion for the PRC Program:

- Have activities that increase the opportunities for community members to interact across PRCs and collaborate on grants.

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