


# IRB Tipsheet: Reviewing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

*A Quick Reference for IRB Members*

## Continuum of Community- Engaged Research

| Less Community Engagement   |   |  | Complete Community Engagement   |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |   |  |   |
| <b>Researchers</b> design study question  | <b>Community</b> helps identify issues and research questions and provides some responses | <b>Community</b> helps identify research questions, provides responses, helps generate solutions based on findings | <b>Community</b> defines the issues and research questions, creates data collections tools, recruits participants and collects data, analyzes data, disseminates findings and carries out action plan. Full collaborator at all stages. |
| <b>Community</b> answers questions  | <b>Researchers</b> conduct research, analysis, dissemination, design, intervention        | <b>Researchers</b> collect and analyze data, disseminate findings, develop interventions based on suggestions      | <b>Researchers</b> are collaborators  |

Adapted from Community Engagement & Community-Based Participatory Research presentation by Tiffany Powell-Wiley, MD, MPH

### What Is CBPR?

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an approach to research in which investigators and community partners work collaboratively throughout the research process. Community members may help define the research question, contribute to study design, assist with recruitment and data collection, and participate in interpreting and sharing results.

This approach emphasizes shared decision-making, mutual learning, and producing outcomes that are meaningful to the community. Because CBPR centers partnership and collaboration, it may not fit neatly within traditional research models.

### Why CBPR Requires Special Attention

CBPR requires special IRB attention because it expands traditional roles, involves community members as partners, and may evolve over time, with impacts beyond individual participants.

IRB must balance protections with flexibility as overly rigid requirements can unintentionally disrupt these collaborative partnerships.

## Key Considerations for IRB Review

### Community Involvement and Research Roles

In CBPR community members may act as co-investigators, recruiters, or advisors and may be considered engaged in research. IRBs should assess training needs, Federalwide Assurance (FWA) coverage, or

reliance agreement options to ensure, expectations are appropriate, accessible and proportionate to their roles and the level of research risk.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent in CBPR is often an ongoing culturally appropriate process rather than a single event. IRBs should ensure the process supports clear understanding and voluntary participation with appropriate materials, settings, and opportunities for questions emphasizing participant comprehension over the form itself.

### **Risks to Individuals and Communities**

CBPR involves both individual and community-level risks including confidentiality breaches, stigmatization, or reputational harm. IRBs should ensure these risks are identified and mitigated, with careful consideration of how findings are interpreted and shared to minimize potential harms.

### **Data Stewardship and Dissemination**

CBPR involves shared data ownership, access, and dissemination often including community partners. IRBs should ensure clear transparent plans for data access, result sharing, and prevention of misuse, reflecting the collaborative nature of the research.

### **Power and Governance**

CBPR emphasizes balancing power between researchers and community partners. IRBs should ensure governance supports fair, transparent, and meaningful community participation, particularly in communities with prior research harms or exploitation while respecting community expertise and avoiding inequities.

### **Applying Belmont Principles in CBPR**

The Belmont principles remain the foundation for ethical review but may be applied more broadly in CBPR.

- **Respect for persons** includes not only individual consent, but also culturally appropriate, ongoing engagement with participants and communities.
- **Beneficence** extends to minimizing harms not only to individuals but also to communities.
- **Justice** involves fair inclusion, equitable distribution of benefits, and attention to power dynamics within the research relationship.

When the IRB is reviewing CBPR, a key question to consider is: **Does this study protect participants and communities without undermining the partnership that makes the research ethical and effective?**

CBPR is not less ethical than traditional research; it is ethical in different ways. Effective IRB review requires balancing participant protections with flexibility and recognizing the value of community expertise in the research process.