



COMMUNITY-ENGAGED METHODS

Community Voice and Power Sharing Guidebook

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Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are realizing the need for and importance of including community-engaged methods (CEM) in their work. As part of this effort, the Urban Institute created toolkits on different topics in community-engaged work to aid those who are just beginning this work or are looking to expand or deepen the work they are already doing.

- **CEM involves the intentional and explicit inclusion of studied communities as contributors, participants, and/or reviewers in the research process.** At its core, CEM requires that researchers and institutions relinquish power to make research more collaborative and inclusive. It is centered on people's autonomy, empowerment, and input and is made possible when researchers commit to being partners with communities and share decisionmaking power over processes and outcomes. However, there is no one formula for doing community-engaged research. Such research is a continuum of possibilities for research with community members or community organizations as partners.
- **Benefits of CEM.** The Urban Institute recognizes that engaging a wider range of stakeholders in a project's design, implementation, and analysis can strengthen research designs, more effectively address local needs and challenges, nurture a community's assets and strengths, advance equity and inclusion, and improve policy impact. Practitioners can use CEM to foster important outcomes such as culturally relevant research, more effective programs and services, improved public policy, and community empowerment.
- **The need for community empowerment in research.** There is a long and problematic history of excluding community voices, particularly those of people of color, from research design, implementation, and analysis. Traditionally, marginalized communities see little to no return on their investment and feel used by professionals who come in, collect data from community members, and leave without a trace. Not only is this harmful to communities, but this kind of extractive relationship erodes trust between researchers and community members. Today, the greater unwillingness among communities of color to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations may be largely a consequence of the research sector's history of maltreatment. Notably, this troubled history also affects community willingness to engage in social policy work, whether related to research, government, or direct services.
- **Community engagement can improve the quality, impact, and sustainability of research.** Working in partnership with the community enables researchers to ask better questions, reach the right members of the population, and pointedly draw conclusions and recommendations. Community members offer direct experiential knowledge and expertise that are impossible for researchers to possess. Engaging a wider range of such stakeholders ensures the data collected and analysis conducted are more robust and lead to more accurate findings and effective recommendations. A community-based approach to research builds on existing assets and strengths, leading to more sustainable results. When researchers and community members collaboratively digest results, they can identify solutions that are immediately applicable to the lives of community members or results that go beyond the original intent of the project to meet community interests.

Although CEM can significantly improve research quality, it does require more time and resources than traditional research. Researchers planning to begin community-engaged research must ensure they have the requisite time and funding to truly build a trusting and sustainable partnership with the community. Researchers also must relinquish some control over the project to the community. Although community partners do not need to have a steering role, their input must be valued and used throughout the research process. Lastly, research must strike a balance between academic and community-based research standards and priorities. Though CEM can be more difficult and require more resources, the potential benefits often outweigh any real or perceived barriers.

CEM Toolkits and Worksheets for Fostering Community Voice and Power Sharing

Key questions to help prompt authentic community engagement include the following:

- What are the goals of community engagement for my project?
- What do I have to offer the community in return for their efforts?
- Which community members could contribute the most? What subcommunities need to be included?
- How can I ensure community members feel heard and valued across project stages?

Urban has produced a set of tools designed to advance the CEM dialogue from the “what” to the “how.” This comprehensive set of practitioner tools, described below, supports the practical, real-world application of CEM among community members and other stakeholders.

01 Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement

The key to effectively engaging communities in research is building strong partnerships. [This toolkit](#) is intended for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in finding and building relationships with partners to facilitate community-engaged research. In this guide, you will find actionable information on why building equitable and sustainable partnerships is important, how to find and evaluate potential partners, and best practices for building good partnerships. This component also provides guidance on finding and evaluating a partner and understanding the pillars of good partnership.

02 Community Advisory Board Project-Based Tools and Resources

CEM aims to bring community voices to the table. A community advisory board (CAB) is a diverse group of community members selected to voice community perspective as coleaders, advisers, or decisionmakers on the project team. [This component](#) provides key tools and resources for planning, forming, and operating a CAB, including a considerations checklist, profiles of some Urban project-based CABs, an institutional review board tool, and a budget tool. This component also provides a readiness checklist to use for CAB planning.

03 Youth Engagement in Policy, Research, and Practice

Youth engagement is building relationships between young people and adults through intentional, inclusive, and mutually beneficial interactions. A project can operationalize youth engagement in various ways. [This toolkit](#) shares some ideas and considerations that will help you strategically and safely incorporate young people into a project. Key features of this component are a snapshot of the benefits of youth engagement; Urban’s models for youth engagement and practitioners’ methods and tools; questions to ask yourself before, during, and after engaging young people; and a youth engagement project evaluation worksheet.

04 Community Engaged Surveys: From Research Design to Analysis and Dissemination

[This toolkit](#) was created for Urban Institute researchers interested in community-engaged survey research. It focuses on how to incorporate CEM into survey research and provides examples of projects across the Urban Institute that have used CEM in surveys. This resource also provides guidance on research questions and contextualization; question testing; survey implementation; and analysis, drafting, and dissemination.

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