



Community Academic Partnerships (CAPs) Project

Project Information Sheet

Project Overview

The proposed research seeks to contribute to the current evidence base on the effectiveness of community academic partnerships as an approach to towards improving community health. The CAPs Project is a prospective, descriptive study of the factors affecting the collaborative process in community academic partnerships with which the RMPRC is partnering to improve community health outcomes. It will use a participatory evaluation process with two partnerships to study how partnership group structure and process affect aspects of: a) how the partnerships *function*, e.g., leadership, administration and management, use of member resources (Weiss et al., 2002); b) *partnership synergy*, i.e., how well members work together for “the common good” of the partnership (ibid.; Lasker et al., 2001); and c) *partnership effectiveness*. Indicators of partnership effectiveness are drawn from organizational development and effectiveness theory, the Competing Values Framework, which takes into account the organization’s culture and corresponding domains of effectiveness, and is thus, multi-dimensional and dependent on an organization’s core values (Quinn, 1998; Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The development of partnership effectiveness will be further described in terms of how it is associated with indicators of sustainable policy and practice for community health initiatives.

Research questions of the study are to understand:

1. how **partnership structure** (e.g., governance and communication structure) and **process** (e.g., for engaging partners, for decision-making), affect **dimensions of partnership functioning** (such as leadership effectiveness and the degree to which partnership optimizes the use of partners' resources and time);
2. how measured **dimensions of partnership functioning** affect the development of **synergy** in a partnership, i.e., “the extent to which the perspectives, resources, and skills of its participating individuals and organizations contribute to and strengthen the work of the group” (Weiss et al., 2002);
3. how **partnership effectiveness** is characterized in developing community academic partnerships within the **organizational culture types** described by the Competing Values Framework;
4. how **partnership structure, process, and culture** change through the life of a community academic partnership as characterized by the Competing Values Framework?
5. the relationship between **partnership synergy** and **partnership effectiveness**; and
6. what indicators are of **potentially sustainable policy and practice for community health initiatives** and how they are associated with the development of **partnership effectiveness** in community academic partnerships.

Rationale for the Project and a Proposed Framework

In past decade, most of the research base about CBPR has drawn from studies evaluating the benefits and promise of community-based participatory research as a research approach leading to improved health behavior interventions that are tailored to the local context and potentially more sustainable (reviewed in Best et al., 2003; Israel et al., 1998; Roussel et al., 2002; Viswanathan et al., 2004). This type of collaboratively designed community health research has been undertaken by partnerships comprised of academic researchers and members of the community, or *community academic partnerships*. While these have contributed to our understanding of “how to do” CBPR, they have been primarily retrospective studies, sharing the “lessons learned” among academic and community partnerships engaged in CBPR.

The CAPs Project will build upon those lessons learned, and what we understand thus far about facilitators of and barriers to successful partnership functioning. We will assess indicators of partnership functioning, and engage partners in a participatory evaluation process to understand implications for their partnership’s organizational processes and structure. An instrument for measuring partnership functioning and levels of partnership synergy has been developed by Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health (Weiss et al., 2002). Indicators of partnership effectiveness, within the context of partnership culture, will be assessed by partnership members, based on organizational development and effectiveness theory. In particular, the Competing Values Framework (Quinn, 1988; Belasen, 1997; Yang and Shao, 1996; Altschuld and Zheng, 1995) proposes that, in contrast to traditional notions of a single, universal model of organizational effectiveness, effectiveness is multi-dimensional and dependent on an organization’s values and culture. One dimension describes a continuum for whether an organization’s values flexibility vs. stability and control. The other dimension distinguishes between an organization being internally vs. externally oriented.

Thus, we will engage in a prospective study of the partnership process and structure in two community academic partnerships, to promote understanding of their relationship to partnership functioning and overall partnership effectiveness.

Benefits of participation

In addition to contributions to the field of community based participatory research, the two partnerships to be studied will benefit by engaging in a cycle of reflection and action through the participatory evaluation process. It is anticipated that organizational learning through this process will benefit partnership development and effectiveness.

Timeline

The project has piloted the three instruments with a local NPO board, and will present summary results to that board in October 2005. One partnership has been recruited and members who consent to participation will take the Partnership Self Assessment Instrument in November. A second partnership will be recruited this fall.

Project Team membership

The research design has developed over the past year by a project team, whose collaborative efforts and innovative thinking are gratefully acknowledged by Terry Uyeki, Project Leader: John Brett (anthropologist, UCDHSC), Sally Davis (NM-PRC & UNM), Carrie Heltzel (facilitation and mediation consultant), Cindy Medina (community development & environmental activist), and Trina Rivera (PRC research associate & project data manager).