Network and System Science Contributions to Advancing Community Engagement in Translational Research

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- Participants: faculty from Health Sciences Colleges at the University of South Carolina; community partners

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Why Should We Study Community Engagement?

- Mounting evidence regarding the importance of social and other ecological factors for positive health outcomes.

- Trends in knowledge production and public sentiment regarding research necessitate strategies for embracing localized knowledge
  - Localized knowledge enhances validity of basic research
  - Localized knowledge enhances validity of translation

- To maximize efficient use of resources allocated to translational efforts, we need to understand the science of best processes in community engagement

Challenges: Benefits and Costs of Partnering

- Community partner motivations
  - Community advocacy
  - Development of new skills
  - Community service
  - Accessing piece of university funding "pie"

- Researcher motives
  - Securing funding
  - Access to research subjects
  - Feedback on intervention development
  - Community service

Challenges: Cultural Tensions

- Power Inequities
  - Historical examples of community exploitation by researchers
  - Economic fault lines
  - Digital divide
- Value Orientations
  - Potential for different cultural notions of health and well-being
  - Different reward structures
- Challenges in securing ongoing community representation

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Challenges: Balancing "Product" and "Process"

- Conceptualizations of time

- Expectation about solutions for community problems

- Development of capacity for participation

- *"every objective stands for two things: an end in and of itself, and a stage of development, a means to a later end"*

  -Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, 1997: 23)

Limitations of Existing Knowledge Base

- Predominance of single-case designs
- Lack of parallel data from academic and community partners
- Gaps in knowledge regarding specific mechanisms through which community-based initiatives are likely to be most successful
- Limited attention to system-level factors

Study Design

- Setting: University of South Carolina and surrounding communities
- Samples:
  - faculty in health sciences colleges (medicine, nursing, social work, pharmacy, public health) (N=130, 70% response rate)
  - community research partners of participating faculty (N=34, 56% response rate)
- Phase I: online survey of faculty and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with community partners
- Phase II: comparative case study research on selected partnerships (underway)
- Assurances related to confidentiality

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Faculty Survey and Community Partner Interviews

- Instruments developed from themes in existing literature and records of institution-wide strategic planning discussions and pilot tested

- Survey/Interview content
  - General
    - Attitudes toward community engaged research
      - Costs and benefits of CER
      - Time-related expectations
      - Resource allocation
      - Validity of CER
      - Fair treatment of community members
      - Power over decision-making
    - Needs for institutional supports
  - Partnership-specific
    - Modes of communication and collaboration

Results: Training and Duration of Experience in Community-Engaged Research

	Academic Researchers n = 130		Community Partners n = 34	
	#	%	#	%
Training[1]				
No Formal	66	50.77%	---	---
Informal	65	50.00%	29	93.55%
Formal - Graduate School	27	20.77%	26	83.87%
Formal - Outside Graduate School	25	19.23%	26	83.87%
Experience				
None	32	24.62%	---	---
1-3 years	23	17.69%	3	9.68%
4-9 years	25	19.23%	11	35.48%
10+ years	50	38.46%	17	54.84%

Results: Attitudes Toward Community Engaged Research

- Faculty with previous experience in community-engaged research held significantly stronger positive attitudes than those without previous experience.

- Faculty with previous experience were significantly more likely to acknowledge challenges of community-engaged research than those without faculty experience.

- In most areas, faculty and community partners demonstrated high levels of agreement.

- Key differences in faculty and community partner attitudes
    - CER increases time to generate results
    - CER results are available locally in a more timely fashion
    - CER distributes resources more fairly

Results: Academic Researcher & Community Partner Recommendations for Faculty Training

Training Topics	Academic Researchers	Community Partners
Working effectively with different racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups	58%	100%
Developing and maintain dialogue with community partners	66%	100%
Being a skillful learner	38%	94%
Sharing power and control over decisions	54%	90%
Leadership skills training	43%	94%

Study Limitations

- Chain-referral sampling strategy relied upon faculty participation in identifying community partners

- Considerable barriers to recruitment of community partners could introduce bias

- Role of investigator may have impact response rates.

- Even with network-wide study design, the sample of reciprocal ties is rather small, which limits generalizability of the study findings.

Implications for Advancing Community Engagement

- Faculty with experience can be valuable mentors and "boundary spanners" for researchers beginning to partner with communities

- Across an array of projects, there are significant gaps in expectations regarding resource allocation and timelines for producing results

- Using a system-wide perspective to examine partnerships informs institutional priorities for resource development and ongoing community relations