**NCER Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) Primer**

Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) is a framework or orientation for conducting research that supports the premise that people ought to be involved in the decisions, as well as the cultivation of information those decisions are guided by, that affect their lives (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Israel et al. 1998). CEnR also acknowledges that communities harbor a wealth of information about their own experiences and perspectives that may be used to positively inform and shape research endeavors. It encourages recognition of the strengths of the community institutions and individual members. CEnR builds upon those strengths to help inform the research project and produce the results that may benefit both the academic or institutional researchers (henceforth referred to as just "researchers") and community partners (e.g. community-based organizations) (Israel 2005). CEnR may incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and can be applied to a range of topics including environmental science and engineering, public health, and social sciences. CEnR is not a uniform approach, but can occur along a continuum in a variety of forms, from outreach, through more shared leadership/participatory research approaches (e.g. community-based participatory research) to community-driven/community-led research. See below and Figure 1.

CEnR continuum includes:

*Outreach*
Outreach describes one-way flows of information from researchers to the community. It provides the community with information on the status of the research, findings or interpretation of findings such as communication of risk and risk modification strategies. There is very little to no input into the research design or methods by the community.

*Consultation*
Consultation describes the process of obtaining the feedback or advice from the community to help inform the research project conducted by the researchers. The community input is primarily in the form of consultation, whereby the bulk of the design and methods are determined by the researchers. Community involvement typically occurs after researchers predetermine issues. Community's input is limited.

*Involvement*
Involvement describes more community input and bidirectional communication between the academic researchers and community partners. Communities may be able to provide input into the design, aims, methods, or research questions before these have been predetermined. Both parties cooperate with each other in a more mutual partnership.

*Shared leadership/participatory*
Shared leadership/participatory describes equal shared power, decision-making abilities and ownership of the research project. This is the ideal community-based participatory research (CBPR) partnership (Minkler, M and Wallerstein, N, 2008). Community partners in CBPR typically have equal footing with academic researchers in determining the direction of the project, communicating finding and ownership of the data and information. These projects may also develop research aims that better reflect local concerns and may be more applicable to

translating the research findings into actions. CBPR projects may also enable far greater flexibility in the choice of topics to be investigated.

*Community-driven*

Community-driven describes strong community-led research projects where communities take the lead and initiative in directing the research project. The final decision-making ability lies with the community. They may consult with external academic partners to assist with technical questions. This model of research has been called community-owned and managed research (COMR) and recognizes the community's authority and ability to manage the research enterprise, from the management of funds to the collection of data and generation of findings (Heaney, et al, 2007).

*Community* is defined as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action within similar geographical locations or settings. Community is not only defined by a common geography; communities may also develop around a particular interest, issue, identity, or subject matter.
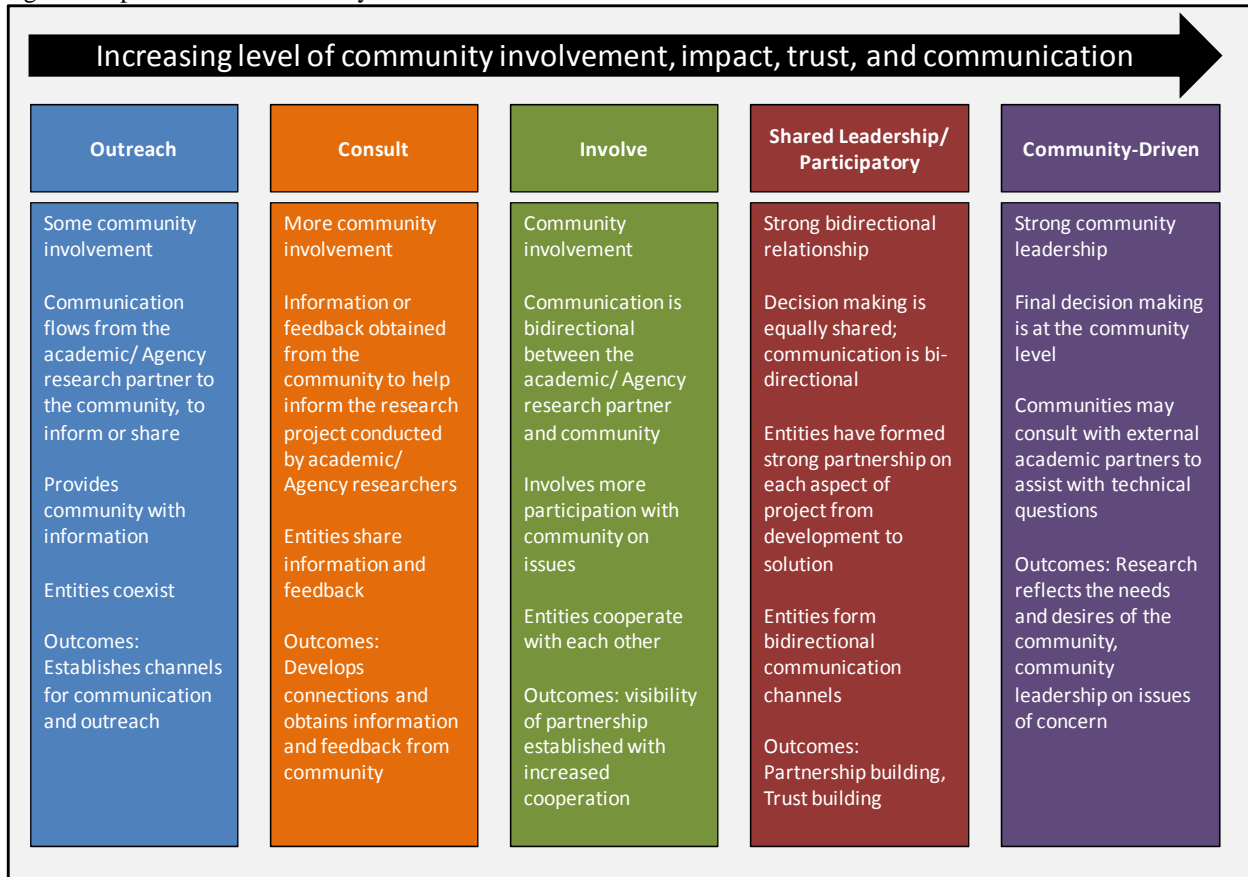
Five core elements that define community are:
- Locus (a sense of place) such as a city, town, village, tribes, neighborhood, workplace, etc.,
- Sharing common interests and perspectives,
- Joint action that bring people together,
- Social ties such as family and friends, and
- Diversity of people and perspectives (MacQueen, et al, 2001).

*Community-based organizations* refer to organizations that may be involved in the research process as members or representatives of the community. Organizations such as health delivery organizations (e.g., hospitals), local public health departments, state public health laboratories, health professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and federally qualified health centers are possible community partners.

To understand the key concepts and principles of CEnR, see Principles of Community Engagement, 2nd Edition (2011), Israel et al. (1998, 2001, 2005) and Minkler and Wallerstein (2008). For approaches to plan and evaluate CEnR, see *Partnerships for Environmental Public Health Evaluation Metrics Manual* published by National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at http://www.niehs.nih.gov/pephmetrics. Key areas addressed in the Manual include community-research partnerships, the translation and dissemination of messages based on research findings, education and training, and capacity building.

Figure 1: Spectrum of Community Involvement in Research

Increasing level of community involvement, impact, trust, and communication

| Outreach | Consult | Involve | Shared Leadership/ Participatory | Community-Driven |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Some community involvement | More community involvement | Community involvement | Strong bidirectional relationship | Strong community leadership |
| Communication flows from the academic/ Agency research partner to the community, to inform or share | Information or feedback obtained from the community to help inform the research project conducted by academic/ Agency researchers | Communication is bidirectional between the academic/ Agency research partner and community | Decision making is equally shared; communication is bi-directional | Final decision making is at the community level |
| Provides community with information | Entities share information and feedback | Involves more participation with community on issues | Entities have formed strong partnership on each aspect of project from development to solution | Communities may consult with external academic partners to assist with technical questions |
| Entities coexist | | Entities cooperate with each other | Entities form bidirectional communication channels | Outcomes: Research reflects the needs and desires of the community, community leadership on issues of concern |
| Outcomes: Establishes channels for communication and outreach | Outcomes: Develops connections and obtains information and feedback from community | Outcomes: visibility of partnership established with increased cooperation | Outcomes: Partnership building, Trust building | |

Modified from Principles of Community Engagement, 2nd Edition and Scammel, 2007

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