

Civic Participation Beyond Voting

Seeding Civic Participation through Research

Each day policies and practices affect the health of families. Often, they are developed and enacted without significant input from the community members most affected. This brief highlights the process and the impact of Vitalyst Health Foundation's investment (FY17-18) in Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) in Maryvale. CBPAR is an approach designed to center those closest to the issues that impact their daily health and move them toward civic participation through a collaborative research process.

Civic participation is a way to promote the elements of a healthy community through behavior, regulation and policy changes. Often, civic participation is assumed to be just voting for elected officials to influence policy directly. However, public engagement can involve a range of activities including advocacy, petitions, and canvassing about issues.

Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR)

CBPAR is a well-established and effective approach for involving communities in research activities for a particular purpose such as advocacy efforts. Well-known organizations such as the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation fund CBPAR methods to demonstrate the impact of their investments related to criminal justice, education, and health.¹

Although a formal research framework, CBPAR takes a more collaborative and action oriented approach than traditional

models. It aims to involve all stakeholders in all aspects of the research process including project design, data collection, analysis and reporting. There is particular emphasis on engaging those that are most impacted by the research itself to then take action on the research findings to ultimately better people's lives. CBPAR is a way to engage residents and community leaders around an issue impacting them.

The Advancement Project–Healthy City Community Research Lab emphasizes five underlying assumptions that inform the CBPAR approach:

1. *Community knowledge is irreplaceable and provides vital insights that ground-truths administrative data*
2. *Complex social issues often cannot be well understood or resolved by “expert” research*
3. *Interventions from outside of the community often have disappointing results*
4. *Communities should have equal inclusion and collaboration in the identification, study, and resolution of community issues*
5. *There are value and legitimacy in the knowledge of individuals, families, and others in the community²*

The CBPAR framework begins with a community's issue, proposed action, or strategy and then supports or enhances this action with research that is community-based and engaged.



CBPAR Investment in Maryvale

During FY17-18 Vitalyst invested \$35,000 in building the capacity of resident and community leaders through a public science project in Maryvale, seeking to answer questions related to the health impacts of police and criminalization on residents and neighborhoods. Project involvement provided an avenue for residents to get engaged in their community and have their experiences validated in a credible and action-oriented way to support social change.

Progress to Date

The residents and community leaders involved in Vitalyst’s investment have completed steps one and two of the CBPAR process and are in the midst of completing step three.

Step 1 – Project Design: The project began by consultants meeting with some community leaders to collaboratively design the research plan and identify key research questions. Community leaders aimed to center the research on understanding how current policing policies impact communities of color, immigrant populations, and working class people in Maryvale.

Step 2 – Project Engagement: Once the overall research plan had been constructed, community leaders engaged other residents in Maryvale to support the project implementation. Because this issue is relevant to many communities across Phoenix, the project expanded outside of Maryvale to include South Phoenix community leaders.

Step 3 – Data Collection: Consultants supported residents and community leaders to identify that a survey collected in the community would be the most effective method to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Several sessions took place to co-develop the specific questions for the survey that would be most relevant to better understand criminalization, health and safety. Data collection began in Spring 2018 and will continue through September 2018. To date, 6,000 surveys have been collected with an overall goal of 12,000.

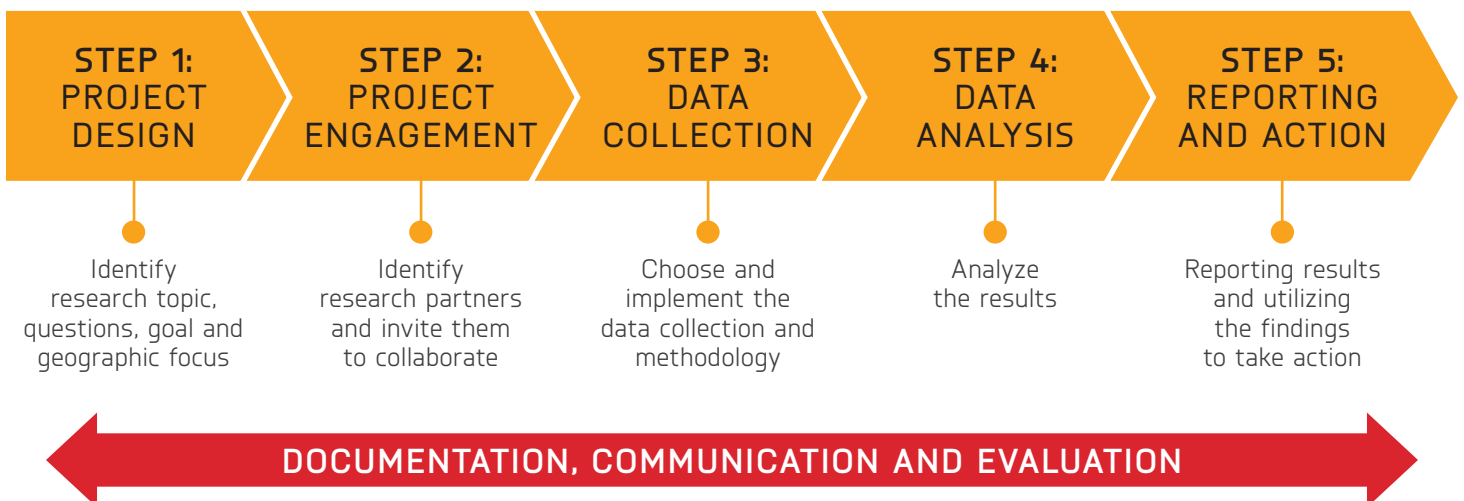
Next Steps

Next steps in the project involve conducting data analysis and eventually a final report to then taking action.

Step 4 – Data Analysis: The data for all of the surveys will be analyzed following the end of data collection. Residents and community leaders will be involved in data entry and analysis to be engaged and learn new skills that can use for future projects.

Step 5 – Reporting and Action: Once the data is analyzed, findings will be compiled into a report that will support advocacy efforts such as presenting to City Council, partnering with funders or working with school boards to make the necessary policy changes to improve community conditions related to health and safety.

Community-Based Participatory Action Research Process Model



Source: Advancement Project–Healthy City, 2011

Impact of CBPAR on Community Leaders

Residents and community leaders involved in the public science project have noted specific benefits experienced thus far in their work by being involved in a collaborative research process.

- **Made Research Accessible.** While residents and community leaders were familiar with the idea of research, it felt external. CBPAR made it accessible and catalyzed the work. It removed institutional barriers to engaging in research by allowing them to develop a research plan that was relevant to issues in their community without relying on an academic grant or a professional researcher to lead the process. They were able to have ownership of the project and capture the missing data of their lived experiences.
- **New Realization of Inherent Power.** Leaders commented that it felt powerful to be community-driven with an approach that was traditionally driven by an external entity in academia. Leaders felt that, “We can do this; and we should do this, because we are the only ones who are asking these questions and want to know these answers.” They recognized that no one else is doing this work or capturing this data.
- **Helped Improve Understanding.** Building a survey was challenging, and it required reflection and an evolutionary process of asking questions about what needs to be understood. Doing so helped leaders and residents gain clarity in their understanding of the issue. It supported them to articulate what evidence was required to understand the impact of criminalization on health in a complete way.
- **Enhanced Partnerships.** The actual collection of surveys has built new partnerships, opened new points of access and has helped to solidify some existing relationships and given people the tangible work to go and have a sense of progress. The survey collection is a very tangible way to work together and show progress with systems change efforts.

Using CBPAR in Your Work

Here are some resources to explore CBPAR further and consider ways to include it in your work:

Community Research Toolbox by the *Advancement Project–Healthy City Community Research Lab*. This toolbox offers a variety of toolkits that support the understanding of community-based research including a short guide offering an overview of CBPAR along with a more detailed instructional toolkit and even information about participatory asset mapping. You can access it here: <http://www.healthycity.org/cbpar-toolbox/>

Community-Based Participatory Research: A Strategy for Building Healthy Communities and Promoting Health through Policy Change by *Policy Link*. This report offers an overview of CBPR along with specific case studies on how it can be used to support community-driven health efforts. You can access it here: <http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CBPR.pdf>

Participatory Action Research Map by *María Elena Torre from the Public Science Project*. This one-page table provides key assumptions, practices and questions to guide a participatory action research project. You can access it here: <http://www.publicscienceproject.org/files/2013/04/PAR-Map.pdf>

References

- 1 Public Science Project (n.d.). *Funders*. Retrieved from: <http://publicscienceproject.org/funders/>
- 2 Advancement Project–Healthy City Lab (2011). *A Short Guide to Community-Based Participatory Action Research*. Retrieved from: <https://hc-v6-static.s3.amazonaws.com/media/resources/tmp/cbpar.pdf>



CBPAR is an effective way to engage community leaders and residents in an authentic way that can lead to positive changes in a community.

2929 N Central Ave, Ste 1550
Phoenix Arizona 85012

602.385.6500
vitalysthealth.org

Civic Participation Beyond Voting: Seeding Civic Participation Through Research

Author: Stephanie Luz Cordel

Stephanie Luz Cordel is the founder of All Voices Consulting and works as a collaborative consultant focused on enhancing social impact through equitable and inclusive change strategies.

Collaborators: Raquel Gutierrez and Ken Chapman

©2018 Vitalyst Health Foundation.

All Rights Reserved.

Material may be published without permission where proper acknowledgment is made.

Improving well-being in Arizona by addressing root causes and broader issues that affect health.

Count on us to pursue the following goals:

- Improve access to care and coverage throughout Arizona
- Advance community policies and practices that result in healthy communities that are accessible to all
- Increase the capacity and effectiveness of community-based leaders, organizations and coalitions
- Cultivate collaborations and innovations that leverage the elements of a healthy community
- Increase civic participation for inclusive decision-making to advance health equity

For more publications, news, and other education and advocacy resources, visit vitalysthealth.org.



A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH