



# Practical Guides for Writing About Community-Based Participatory Research

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*Progress in Community Health Partnerships:  
Research, Education, and Action*



## What is CBPR?

- Collaborative approach that equitably involves all community partners in the research process, recognizing unique strengths of each (Israel et al., 1998)
  - Begins with topic of importance to community
  - Combines knowledge with action
  - Promotes social change to improve outcomes



## Why focus on writing about CBPR?

- Valuable to use participatory approach when studying community problems
- Investigators, reviewers & editors may not be familiar with CBPR
- Challenging to highlight unique features of CBPR in traditional manuscript format



# Getting Started

- Define specific aim of paper
- Identify targeted audience
- Pick appropriate journal
  - Biomedical or social science
  - Check journal's instructions & editorial board
  - Call editor if in doubt
- Outline basic structure of paper



# Authorship

- Discuss expectations for authorship early
- Give partners an opportunity to contribute
- Establish a publication protocol or committee
- Don't assume partners understand the academic approach to authorship & writing
- Consider long-term value of including partners
- Use acknowledgments liberally



## Engaging (not Enraging) Authors

- Embrace a participatory process for writing
- Ask what partners want to write about
- Explain how journals differ from magazines
- Consider options for capturing thoughts of partners
- Warn partners that editing will be necessary



# Title

- Keep it simple & succinct
  - Avoid jargon
- Use it to grab attention
  - Pose a question
  - Highlight the main finding



# Abstract

- Write last but write well!
- Use structured format whenever possible
- Make sure abstract consistent with results
- Remember your targeted audience



# Introduction: General Principles

- Succinctly explain rationale for work including conceptual model or theory
- Provide just enough information to orient targeted audience
- Cite the most pertinent references
- Clearly state aims, questions, or hypotheses



# Introduction: Why use CBPR?

- What is the problem & its prevalence?
- Are specific groups affected disproportionately?
- Are affected groups difficult to reach, poorly understood, or disenfranchised?
- What are limitations of traditional research?
- What are advantages of CBPR for this study?
  - Remember to define CBPR



# Methods: General Principles

- Identify study design
- Create appropriate subsections
  - Study population & setting
  - Participatory methods
  - Intervention
  - Study variables & measurement methods
  - Analysis methods
  - IRB approval



# Methods:

## General Principles cont'd

- Cite references for established methods
- Document how human subject & community concerns were addressed
- Explain financial support & incentives for participants
- Don't put results in Methods!



## Methods:

### How was this community-based?

- Study Population & Setting
  - How does study define the community?
  - How is community organized or structured?
  - What are points of contact?
  - What are the means of influence?
  - How is setting relevant to community of interest?



## Methods:

### How did community participate?

- Participatory methods
  - Who were community partners?
  - Why/how were they chosen?
  - What roles did they have in design, implementation, analysis, interpretation & dissemination?
  - What was done to ensure data integrity & methodologic rigor?



# Results:

## General Principles

- Use appropriate subheadings
- For original research:
  - Characteristics of study population
  - Results of main analysis:
    - univariate then multivariate for quantitative
    - themes or patterns for qualitative
    - main groups before subgroups
  - Results of secondary analyses



# Results:

## General Principles cont'd

- Use tables & figures to present key information succinctly
- Don't repeat in text all data in tables & figures
- Don't put methods in Results!
- Save commentary for Discussion!



## Results:

### What's unique about CBPR?

- Report both process & outcome measures
- Include community-level findings & responses to study
- Explain what is happening in the community as a result of study



# Discussion: General Principles

- Summarize key findings, emphasizing what's unique or innovative
- Identify and explain strengths & weaknesses relative to other work, noting differences between studies
- Discuss implications for clinical care, education, research and/or health policy in communities of interest



# Discussion:

## General Principles cont'd

- Don't surprise reader with results in Discussion!
- Cite pertinent references & do so appropriately
- Avoid conclusions not supported by results!



# Discussion:

## What did CBPR add?

- Strengths & Weaknesses
  - What were strengths of using CBPR approach?
  - How did partners influence interpretation of findings?
  - What challenges & opportunities were created by using CBPR approach?



# Discussion:

## What did CBPR add?

- Implications
  - How were results shared with community?
  - How did community respond?
  - How do findings apply to other communities?
  - Could intervention be replicated?
  - What recommendations & limitations do community leaders need to know about?



# References

- Cite landmark original research
- Check for accuracy & completeness
- Use reference manager software
- Follow journal's instructions



# Tables

- Label rows & columns clearly so that all readers can understand them
- Use tables only when more efficient than using text
- Combine tables with similar content
- Round off numbers appropriately



# Figures

- Label them so that all readers can easily interpret them!
- Use to highlight key findings where a visual image is more powerful than words



# Summary

- **Pay** attention to principles for each part of a paper
- **Reinforce** text with strategically selected & clearly labeled tables & figures
- **Explain** why CBPR approach used
- **Specify** how participatory methods were used
- **Specify** what CBPR approach added to results