“Strategies to Help Communities Apply Research Findings”

HCC Faculty Dialogues begin with interesting and provocative questions intended to encourage participants to share both good and challenging experiences in community research. This is an opportunity to share lessons learned and to ask questions of those who “have been there and done that”. Information from faculty dialogue will be posted to the HCC as a resource for others interested in the topic. Research Pearls reflect the contributions of participants in the dialogue.

Pearls to Help Communities Apply Research Findings

1. Acknowledge that in community engaged research there are several steps beyond translating findings into user friendly summaries. Many stop at just this point. To do this well, we must consider how we can participate in the process that will move knowledge from paper to practice to embedment to sustainability. Ultimately the goal is to facilitate the transformation of people, practice, or policy.

2. **ASK** yourself what you ultimately would like to accomplish. There are different answers to this question. Not everyone wants to change even a tiny piece of the world with their work; others want to do just that. Decide who you are, and then add a complimentary person to your team.

3. Translation and transfer planning should begin during the development of the research plan. Involve key stakeholders and targeted beneficiaries in the planning process to ensure that the final products will be transferable, scalable and endorsed.

4. During the initial engagement process begin the discussion about what should happen when the project concludes. Illicit the expectations of all partners and organize this list into categories; 1) expectations that are reasonable and likely to be met; 2) expectations that are not reasonable or beyond the scope of the project and likely not to be met and 3) expectations that are reasonable, possibly not related to the investigator’s original plan but possible.

5. Identify the “anything else” opportunities and build them into the plan. Anything Else Opportunities are often expressed as questions (is it possible to….can we also…..) about what can be done or added to a research plan that will meet a communities expectation, address another related or unrelated concern or enhance an existing resource or service. When responses to these opportunities are built into the plan, there is a likelihood that a stronger partnership will develop that may lead to sustainability.

6. Remove your “needs glasses” and equally attend to the planning process that identifies community assets, trusted resources, people, and community culture. This information will be useful during the translation, dissemination and application process.

7. **ASK** about the most acceptable means to prepare final reports detailing evidence, lessons, best practices, failures, and recommendations. Be prepared to share information in several formats. For example in addition to the scientific brief or document prepared to meet funder expectations, you might prepare a concise, one page set of talking points that community leaders can use to influence local decision makers.
A second summary may be prepared for lay people or the intended beneficiaries. This document should be more personal and contextually relevant. It may also be introduced with evidence of endorsement by a trusted community person.

8. Formalize the endorsement of recommendations, action strategies and similar ‘change-urging’ materials. For example, one agency added a cover letter with a picture of a well-known, highly regarded community advocate to the materials that were disseminated throughout a community.

9. Come out of the office, out of your report/summary, out of the professional community to introduce, discuss and refine recommendations that are intended to change organizations, individuals, policies and practices. Advance the use of evidence in the same place it will be used and with the people who will most benefit.

10. Select the most appropriate communications strategies with knowledgeable stakeholders. Early in the relationship consider who should lead this effort and involve the individual or organization in the ongoing communication with the community of interest. Communication should be specific, regular, reiterative and contextually relevant throughout the conduct of the research.

11. Include key stakeholders in the discussions about what should occur next, who should do what and how. The goal is to transfer new knowledge to practical use in a manner that will support transformative change. Be prepared to participate in conversations about how the methods may change to fit the non-research context.

12. Arrange discourse events to share preliminary interpretations of the findings, to obtain feedback from the community to determine, if the research is on the right track.

13. Sometimes you have to encourage stakeholders to “think out of the box” that you brought them. To accomplish this, ask yourself first …how is the research useful to the community or the research participants. Offer examples of ways that other cities have shared or used their findings.

14. It is important to think about how to translate complicated project titles into a different message. This will set the stage for explaining the significance of the research in a non-scientific way.

15. In qualitative research that captures participant narratives, retain the language of the speaker whenever possible in the summary. The message may ultimately be more persuasive.

16. Where appropriate, it may be helpful to work with local celebrities to promote your message, project or findings. Many celebrities who choose to partner in the manner have been affected by the issue personally or it has affected someone close to them.

The information contained in this summary was contributed by participants in the Healthy City Faculty Dialogue conducted at the University of Illinois at Chicago. For additional information about the Faculty Dialogue series, please contact Cynthia Boyd, Director, Office of Community Engagement and Neighborhood Health Partnerships at cboyd@uic.edu.