

General Guidance for Community-Engaged Research

The Trinity Institutional Review Board supports community-engaged research (CEnR) as it does all research. The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching defines CEnR as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, state/regional, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and research in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” As such, there are some specific ideas to consider when designing a community engaged research project, from an IRB perspective. These are outlined below. It is also recommended that you [review this handout, created by the Center for Hartford Education and Research \(CHER\) for community engaged projects.](#)

Relationship of community partner to Trinity (taken from Zimmerman et al., 2021)

Consider the following scenarios when determining what actions to take with regard to CenR.

1. Your community partnership is a non-community-engaged research partnership.

- No specific action needed regarding community engagement, all other IRB regulations must be followed.

2. You are doing community-based research. For example, your community partner is giving you access to participants by posting recruitment flyers, sharing data, or providing study sites for observation. The partnership may be collaborative, but it does not appear to be beneficial to the community partner.

- You should confirm with the community organization whether you need to get approval from their IRB if they have one.

3. Your partnership is led by you and others at Trinity. You have shared interests with the community partner. The partnership is collaborative and mutually beneficial, that is both you and the partner have input into the project and the results will benefit both you and the community partner. However, in terms of decision making, Trinity appears to be taking the lead on study design. The community partner may be involved in things like helping to identify recruitment options or facilitating meetings with community members.

- You should confirm with the community organization whether you need to get approval from their IRB if they have one.

4. You have a cooperative partnership: The research team and the community partner both have direct interests in the research and support its goals, but there is no shared decision making. There may be, for example, a community advisory board that gives input on the study, including study design and methodology and data interpretation but they do not have the same level of decision-making authority as the research team. For some studies in this category, community members are hired as staff to recruit participants, collect data, and conduct other research activities.

- You should confirm with the community organization whether you need to get approval from their IRB if they have one.
- Any individual project staff from the community organization should complete ethics training.

5. You have a collaborative and reciprocal partnership: You share decision-making with community partners, such as in participatory action research. This partnership is both collaborative and mutually beneficial.

- You should confirm with the community organization whether you need to get approval from their IRB if they have one. If they are receiving funding for this collaboration, they should determine if they need to form an IRB if they do not have one.
- If the community organization doesn't have its own IRB:
 - Ensure compliance with ethical standards before proceeding with research.
 - Collaborate with your Trinity's IRB to ensure the research project adheres to ethical guidelines.
 - Any individual project staff from the community organization should complete ethics training

Research ethics training

1. It is recommended that in addition to other CITI modules you take the Community-Engaged Research module (ID: 143477) in CITI. If only certain individuals at the community organization are collaborating with you, those individuals should take CITI training if they are from an academic institution or are an active member of the academic field of study. If not, they should consider taking [CIRTification training](#) designed for community members.

2. If the entire community organization is collaborating with you, it may be important for the study to be reviewed by their own Institutional Review Board. If they are receiving funding, they must have an IRB. If not, they can opt to identify individuals to serve as your collaborators rather than the organization as a whole.

Fairness in recruiting participants

It is up to you to work with your community partner to ensure that recruitment is done equitably. The community partner may have special close relationships with some members of the community you will recruit from. Some may have a therapeutic or service relationship that could come in conflict with participating in this study. Be sure to have an open discussion with your community partner about any conflicts that could impact assuring that “Selection of Subjects is Equitable” as required by federal regulations.

The informed consent process

As with all research studies, it is essential that information is shared with participants and representatives of the community partner in language understandable to the participants and representatives of the community partner. This refers not just to the spoken language but to literacy levels, cultural norms, and other relevant concerns. Your community partner may be the best resource in assuring that any written consent materials are appropriate.

In addition, according to regulations, you do not need to obtain written consent:

“If the subjects or legally authorized representatives are members of a distinct cultural group or community in which signing forms is not the norm, that the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and provided there is an appropriate alternative mechanism for documenting that informed consent was obtained” [such as audio consent alternatives when literacy is a concern].

– 46 CFR 45 §46.117 (c)(1)(iii)

Changes in your protocol

Because community-based research is often collaborative and responds to feedback from the community partner, you may find that you need to modify your research protocol as you proceed. These changes need to be submitted to the IRB, often the review can be expedited.

Further Reading

Anderson EE. CIRTification: Training in Human Research Protections for Community-Engaged Research Partners. *Prog Community Health Partnersh*. 2015 Summer;9(2):283-8. doi: 10.1353/cpr.2015.0044. PMID: 26412769; PMCID: PMC4711932.

Cargill SS, DeBruin D, Eder M, Heitman E, Kaberry JM, McCormick JB, Opp J, Sharp R, Strelnick AH, Winkler SJ, Yarborough M, Anderson EE. Community-Engaged Research Ethics Review: Exploring Flexibility in Federal Regulations. *IRB*. 2016 May-Jun;38(3):11-9. PMID: 27301168; PMCID: PMC4997782.

Manzo, L. C., & Brightbill, N. (2007). Toward a participatory ethics. In *Participatory action research approaches and methods* (pp. 59-66). Routledge.

Zimmerman EB, Raskin SE, Ferrell B, and Krist AH. Developing a classification system and algorithm to track community-engaged research using IRB protocols at a large research university. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science* 6: e6, 1–7. doi: 10.1017/cts.2021.877