Dissemination in Community-Engaged Research: Guidelines for Practice

By Vignesh Kumar, *Our Voice* Research Assistant

I. Background

There are many ways to share research findings, a process formally known as "dissemination," and each method of dissemination holds benefits and limitations. In academia, researchers are generally incentivized to disseminate research findings by publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals or presenting at conferences [1,2,3,4]. These methods are the most commonly recognized to date and are valuable for sharing advancements with scientific and academic communities, furthering researchers' careers, and demonstrating research progress that encourages support from funders [4,5,6]. At the same time, these methods (e.g. publications, journal articles, books, conference presentations) are not necessarily effective for disseminating findings to members of the public or practitioners in the field; especially those who stand to be most affected by the research findings [2,6,7,8]. This disconnect between research findings and their relevant audiences contributes to an estimated 10-25 year gap between the time research discoveries are made and when they impact the health of communities [9].

However, when it comes to engaging communities to co-produce research—such as using the *Our Voice* method—researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure their findings are disseminated back to the relevant communities and stakeholders [2]. In fact, a core tenet of community-engaged research is the dissemination of findings to all partners and their involvement in dissemination to the broader community [2,7,10,11,12]. Firstly, community members deserve opportunities to access, engage with, and benefit from the knowledge they helped create [2]. Furthermore, there are benefits to sharing the findings from co-produced research with the relevant communities and involving them in the process of disseminating to the broader public. Dissemination to and by communities can help to create sustainable, culturally-relevant, and empowering change [7,8,13]. Community-engaged dissemination is also crucial in rebuilding trust, strengthening academic-community partnerships, and increasing future participation among minority communities that have experienced past injustices in the name of "science" [1,2,8,11,12,14]. Together, these indicate that dissemination in community-engaged research must extend beyond simply relaying information *to* communities and instead emphasize collaboration and co-producing materials *with* communities [7].

Despite this principle, less than half of community-based participatory researchers report disseminating their findings outside of academic publications, and only 42% involve community members in the dissemination process [2]. Typically, this is not out of ill intent but rather a lack of time, resources, and training for researchers to broadly disseminate

findings, especially when working with underrepresented communities [2,3,4]. Thus, this raises the question, *how can community-engaged researchers work with community members to effectively disseminate knowledge to communities, stakeholders, and the general public within these constraints?* Researchers and communities have responded to this question by creating innovative examples of "co-dissemination," sometimes facilitated by digital tools [5]. For example, websites, blog posts, social media, infographics, animations, commercials, and science cafes are becoming increasingly popular forms of dissemination in CBPR [2,5,6,7,11,13]. To inform our work and other community-engaged research, we have performed a review of strategies for innovative dissemination and have synthesized some overarching guidelines below.

II. Evidence-Based Practice Guidelines

1. Invest in Dissemination Planning from the Start
- Create a flexible dissemination plan in collaboration with community members early in the project (while establishing project aims, drafting grant applications) [1,3,4,5,8,10,11,12,13,15]
- Determine the purpose of dissemination [5,8,13,14]
- Consider the target audience [1,13,15], conduct community assessment, and tailor format accordingly (e.g. cultural relevance, relatability, language, community strengths, available skills, convenience, networks, potential for creativity, access to community, and power dynamics) [1,5,6,7,8,13,14]
- Select a dissemination format given audience and budget [1,8,13]
- Establish a dissemination timeline considering the ample time needed for community-engaged work [1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,13]
- Allocate dissemination responsibilities, potentially to a dissemination-focused staff or steering subcommittee [1,3,4,5,8,10,14]

2. Garner Institutional Support for Dissemination Efforts
- Request and allocate funding for dissemination at the beginning of the project [1,3,4,5,6,10,11,13]. Ensure that funders' expectations align with community-engaged research practices.
- Work with academic institutions to promote community-engaged research (e.g. communicate the necessity of community co-ownership and co-dissemination of data) [1,3,15]
- Communicate dissemination plans to funding sources (e.g. PCORI, NIH, etc), especially ones that request community dissemination plans [3,8]
- When needed, advocate for policies that benefit communities, partners, and community-engaged research practices while working with IRBs and departments [15]
- Educate funding institutions and colleagues about community-engaged research [3,15]

3. Engage Community Members and Partners in all Aspects of Dissemination
- Dissemination in CBPR goes beyond receiving input—it is a mechanism of community engagement [5,7]
- Actively invite all partners to engage and provide input in all stages of dissemination [3,6,8,10,12,14]. "Active invitations" require making participation accessible to partners (e.g. providing training, honoraria, child care, etc) [12].
- Invite multiple partners to serve as co-authors and co-presenters and come to a consensus on distributing responsibilities equitably and acknowledging contributions [1,12,13]
- Regularly consider the capacity and demands of community members and partners (especially in terms of time and money), and work together to balance their involvement and responsibilities [3].

4. Establish Continuous, Bi-Directional Communication Around Dissemination
- Iterative research processes that seek feedback from target audiences are more likely to influence health care practice than unidirectional processes [6,14]
- Draw on established relationships and foster dialogue early on in partnership [1,6,8,10,11]
- Maintain dissemination as a regularly-visited update agenda item during community meetings [3,8]

5. Build Community Trust through Transparency and Ethical Dissemination Practices
- Be transparent with community members on intentions, motivations, and research purposes [10,11]. Consider having researchers share their personal connections and interest with the research topic to community members [5,10]
- Be transparent and approach community criticism receptively [10,15]
- Implement community feedback in future programs while remaining attentive to scientific rigor [3,10]
- Develop an appropriate and accessible digital presence via social media/academic social networks [5]
- Acknowledge community background, history, and potential past injustices [8]
- Provide opportunities and credit for authorship to all partners even in build-off studies [15]
- Respect community ownership of the data and do not disclose data without community consent [8]

6. Consider Multiple Audiences for Dissemination Products

- Appeal to policy makers and stakeholders to translate findings into change [1,5,12,14]. Develop a policy agenda for the partnership and create policy briefs with partners, potentially through policy training courses [12]
- Work with multiple stakeholders, including at least one strong community partner (e.g. local health department, which is skilled and advocacy and organization and holds ties to policymakers and are skilled in advocacy and organization) [1]
- Consider e.g. community members, fellow researchers, policy makers, city council members, advocates, survivors, external funders, and administrators [15]
- Communicate to intermediaries e.g. journalists, science communication organizations, university public affair liaisons [5]
- Think "big picture" in partnerships and contextualize findings for community members [11]. Describe findings briefly, with real-world relevance, in non-technical language, and with clear recommendations [15]
- Meet with gatekeepers prior to disseminating to the community to better understand potential target audiences and tailor the dissemination efforts accordingly [10]
- Work with diverse community members to tailor findings and content for dissemination for a broad audience [3,6,7,10]

7. Employ Diverse Media to Share Learnings

- Explore visual forms of dissemination (e.g. multimedia, infographics, comics, cartoons, video abstract, dance, theater) [5]
- Present to general public (e.g. science festivals, science slams, road shows, TEDx talks, which can also spread digitally on YouTube) [5]
- Conduct community engagement events (e.g. science shops, hacker and maker spaces, science cafes, science festivals) [5,11]
- Reach broad public audiences through popular press, local community newsletters, radio, and TV stations [12]
- Involving many stakeholders increases dissemination capacity and cultural appropriateness [1]
- Build on community assets and strengths when collaborating on products [6]
- Contribute findings in a sustainable manner for community knowledge/resources [15]

8. Systematically Evaluate Dissemination Efforts

- Conduct evaluations for readability, accuracy, effectiveness, and engagement through quantitative and qualitative metrics [5,6,14]
- Disseminate evaluations and lessons learned to support other CBPR researchers and stakeholders [12,13]

- Consider how projects may or may not be generalizable across populations and geographic areas [13]

III: References

1. Brownson, R. C., Colditz, G. A., & Proctor, E. K. (Eds.). (2018). Dissemination and implementation research in health: translating science to practice. Oxford University Press.
2. Chen, P. G., Diaz, N., Lucas, G., & Rosenthal, M. S. (2010). Dissemination of results in community-based participatory research. American journal of preventive medicine, 39(4), 372–378. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.05.021
3. Satcher, D. (2005). Methods in community-based participatory research for health. John Wiley & Sons.
4. Uphold, H. S., Drahota, A., Bustos, T. E., Crawford, M. K., & Buchalski, Z. (2022). "There's no money in community dissemination": A mixed methods analysis of researcher dissemination-as-usual. Journal of clinical and translational science, 6(1), e105. https://doi.org/10.1017/cts.2022.437
5. Ross-Hellauer, T., Tennant, J. P., Banelytė, V., Gorogh, E., Luzi, D., Kraker, P, Pisacane, L., Ruggieri, R., Sifacaki, E., & Vignoli, M. (2020). Ten simple rules for innovative dissemination of research. PLoS computational biology, 16(4), e1007704. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1007704
6. Vaughn, N. A., Jacoby, S. F., Williams, T., Guerra, T., Thomas, N. A., & Richmond, T. S. (2013). Digital animation as a method to disseminate research findings to the community using a community-based participatory approach. American journal of community psychology, 51(1-2), 30–42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9498-6
7. Mosavel, M., Winship, J., Ferrell, D., & LaRose, J. G. (2018). Data Dissemination in CBPR: Accountability and Responsiveness. Collaborations: A Journal of Community-based Research and Practice, 2(1), 11.DOI: https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.33
8. Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J. G., & Minkler, M. (Eds.). (2017). Community-based participatory research for health: Advancing social and health equity. John Wiley & Sons.
9. Health Economics Research Group OoHE, RAND Europe. Medical research: what's it worth? Estimating the economic benefits from medical research in the UK. London: UK Evaluation Forum, 2008.
10. McDavitt, B., Bogart, L. M., Mutchler, M. G., Wagner, G. J., Green, H. D., Jr, Lawrence, S. J., Mutepfa, K. D., & Nogg, K. A. (2016). Dissemination as Dialogue: Building Trust and Sharing Research Findings Through Community Engagement. Preventing chronic disease, 13, E38. https://doi.org/10.5888/pcd13.150473

11. Mohamed, A. A., Ridgeway, J. L., Njeru, J. W., Molina, L. E., Ahmed, Y. A., Goodson, M., Osman, A., Porraz Capetillo, G. D., Nur, O., Sia, I. G., & Wieland, M. L. (2022). The Recruitment to Dissemination Continuum in Community-based Participatory Research. Progress in community health partnerships : research, education, and action, 16(2), 169–179. https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2022.0021

12. Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group. (2006). Developing and sustaining community-based participatory research partnerships: A skill-building curriculum.

13. Marquez, E., Smith, S., Tu, T., Ayele, S., Haboush-Deloye, A., & Lucero, J. (2022). Step-by-Step Guide to Community-Based Participatory Research. Nevada Minority Health and Equity Coalition. University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

14. Cunningham-Erves, J., Mayo-Gamble, T., Vaughn, Y., Hawk, J., Helms, M., Barajas, C., & Joosten, Y. (2020). Engagement of community stakeholders to develop a framework to guide research dissemination to communities. Health expectations : an international journal of public participation in health care and health policy, 23(4), 958–968. https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13076

15. Goodman, L.A., Thomas, K.A., Serrata, J.V., Lippy, C., Nnawulezi, N., Ghanbarpour, S., Macy, R., Sullivan, C. & Bair-Merritt , M.A. (2017). Power through partnerships: A CBPR toolkit for domestic violence researchers. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Harrisburg, PA. Retrieved from cbprtoolkit.org