What Community Partners Want to Know about How Research is Conducted at Universities

*Note: Most universities have similar processes and offices but the specifics may differ between Northwestern University and other academic institutions.*

**How a research project flows through the university: Research idea to grant completion**

1. Research ideas are discussed by community and academic partners. Faculty informs their department at the earliest stage of discussion.
2. The partners look for funding opportunities
   a. If a grant application only allows only one submission per university, the project may need to go through an internal application at the university.
3. Proposal and budget preparation
   a. Faculty partner works with their department administrator and the Northwestern University (NU) Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) to prepare grant budgets.
   b. If applicable, also prepares subcontracts to community partners or academic partners at other universities. Organizations (community or other universities) that are subcontractors may need the proposal to go through a review process at their institution.
4. Get department approval and signatures of proposal and budget
5. Faculty partner submits the proposal to the OSR. Must submit to OSR at least 5 days before the grant deadline.
6. OSR reviews and identifies necessary changes. Faculty (and partners) make changes.
7. Once review is completed, OSR endorses the proposal on behalf of NU and submits the proposal to the funder.
8. Grant is awarded
9. OSR negotiates and accepts the award
   a. Establishes a grant account
   b. Manages and monitors project. This includes submitting progress and final reports to the funder.
   c. Grant close out when the project and grant are completed.
10. Faculty submits project plan and materials to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval.
11. Conduct of the research project.

*Note: Proposals must go through the above process even if NU is a subcontractor on the application, not the main applicant.*

**Indirect Rates**

During the preparation of the grant budget, you will hear about indirect costs. Indirect costs are items that cannot be directly tied to the project itself. Examples of indirect costs are: Computers, internet access costs, administrative assistant salary, utilities, rent, copies, and general office supplies. Universities have very large indirect rates. At Northwestern University, the rate is 52.5%. Community-based organizations (CBOs) may also be able to include indirect costs for their portion of the grant budget. *Note: See CERC fact sheet on this topic.*
Letters of Support
During the application process, CBOs are often asked to write letters of support and a description of their capabilities and contributions to a project. This may be something required by the grant proposal or something that is thought to strengthen the application. The letter of support usually names the grant describes your organization and its relationship with the researcher, and states what part your organization will play if the grant is funded. A letter of support is not a formal commitment. The commitment is formalized through a subcontract and/or memorandum of understanding.

Subcontracts
While the project may be conducted with your CBO and the NU faculty, the formal legal subcontract is between NU and your organization. The negotiation of the subcontract will involve the NU department and OSR. The subcontract will include the following: a letter of intent, a statement of work, a budget, and a budget justification. The letter of intent is signed by the executive director and demonstrates that the head of the organization is aware and is committing the organizations resources to the project. The statement of work describes completely the work the organization will do on the project. The budget outlines the funding that the organization requires to participate and the justification outlines in detail (including the effort and role for each person on the project) why that funding is needed.

Timeline
Once the grant is submitted, there is no guarantee that it will be funded. Sometimes it may take up to 6 to 12 months to find out funding status, as research grants usually go through a peer-review process by other scientists, followed by reviews from the funding agency. It is not unusual for a large grant to be revised and submitted up to three times or to multiple funders before it is funded. During this waiting time, it is advisable for grant planning and collaboration work to continue so implementation can begin on schedule if you are successfully funded.

Grant Management and Funds Distribution
Once funding is obtained, funds flow from NU to subcontractors and partners. OSR and the NU Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs (ASRSP) manage the grant awards. This responsibility of grant accounting is shared by the NU faculty (principal investigator), the department administrator, the department chair or research center director, the dean, and various central offices.

CBOs that do not have a subcontract must submit invoices for grant expenses to the researcher, who then forward it to ASRSP, which then writes the check. This process can be slow, so CBOs are advised to plan for delays in receiving funds. Often delays in payment are out of the control of individual investigators.

Reporting
Researchers are obligated to report, usually on a semi-annual or annual basis, the progress of their work to the funder. Research partners may ask you to submit reports on behalf of your CBO subcontract or work on the grant to help them write their reports more accurately. The timing of reports and expectations for what reports contain should be made clear in your memorandum of understanding or subcontract.

What kinds of rules and regulations do researchers have to follow?
All NU researchers are required to follow rules and regulations that are specified by NU, their funders, and by state and federal regulators. Some of the most important regulations have to do
with assuring that research does not harm study subjects, and that patient confidentiality is protected.

The **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** at NU reviews research proposals and grants permission for implementation, once the safety and privacy of study participants is established. The review process is intended to protect those who participate in research by providing oversight of issues such as study quality (*Is it good science?*), disclosure of risks and benefits (*If there is the possibility of any benefit or discomfort or risk to the participants, how will you let participants know about it?*), and the design and administration of consent forms (*Are the consent forms clear and explained in a consistent manner?*).

This process must take place, even if your CBO holds the main grant and the researcher is only working for you as an evaluator. The NU researcher is responsible for submitting the application to the IRB and following the regulations, but this process very likely will require your organization’s input.

IRB approval must be renewed annually, and changes in the research protocol (plan for how research is conducted) must be submitted, reviewed, and approved as they occur.

The IRB requires that members of the research team, which may sometimes include you or your CBO staff, take part in IRB training to assure that everyone who is involved in the study has an appropriate level of understanding of the principles of the safe conduct of research.

**Timeline**: No research participants can be recruited and no research data can be collected until the project receives IRB approval. The time it takes for a project to go through and be approved varies depending on the complexity of the project and the sensitivity of the topic and the participants. The IRB review usually takes no more than two or three months to complete but it can be longer or shorter depending on the type of project. Sometimes the IRB requests revisions before they will approve the project. IRB delays should be anticipated when planning the timeline of a project.

**Who else may community partners interact with at the university?**
A research project is usually conducted by a research team, not just a single faculty member. The size and nature of the team varies depending on the size of the project. The lead scientist on a research project is usually called the Principal Investigator (PI). S/he usually assembles a team that may include a Project Director, an Evaluator, and research assistant(s). In community-engaged research projects, some of these roles or additional roles may be filled by community partners.

**How are faculty evaluated and rewarded?**
Most NU researchers are supported by grants. Like CBOs, they raise the money for some or all of their salary and the salaries of their research team by obtaining grants. Researchers may be interested in pursuing a project with a CBO, but need to secure funding in order to conduct a full-scale collaborative research project. On the other hand, many academics also are willing to give talks, review proposals, or serve on boards of CBOs because they share a commitment to the same community or health concern.

To have successful careers, researchers must establish themselves as an expert in a particular area of inquiry, whether it be basic science, clinical, or community health related. This is typically done by building a program of related research projects and presenting the findings of this
research to other faculty at meetings and in professional journals. Academic promotion is based on demonstration of expertise as evidenced by getting grant funding for research projects, authoring journal publications, serving on committees of professional organizations (e.g. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) or government agencies (e.g. National Institutes of Health), and providing education and mentoring for students and junior faculty. For most faculty, all of this translates into a focus on grants and papers, grants and papers.

Faculty are on different promotion tracks. Some tracks are “tenure” tracks and some are non-tenure tracks. Faculty on all tracks are promoted from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor to Full Professor. Faculty are promoted to these different tracks by fulfilling requirements and career progress as described above. Faculty can only be in a certain position (e.g. Assistant Professor) for a designated amount of time before being required to go up for promotion. If they do not fulfill the promotion requirements, they may be asked to leave the university.

What is tenure? Why should faculty promotion and tenure matter to community partners?

Tenure is a faculty member’s contractual right not to have their position terminated without just cause. Once a faculty member is tenured, they cannot be fired. The original purpose of tenure was intended to ensure that faculty had the right to academic freedom (it allows them to have intellectual freedom to study controversial topics and report honest conclusions). There are a decreasing number of faculty who are in tenure-track positions.

The success of research partnerships depends on the development of personal relationships, most often with individual faculty. It is in the best self-interest of the community that a faculty member be recognized and rewarded for their work on community research projects. Establishing respectful, trusting relationships takes a lot of time and effort. Once a community partner is able to build these type of relationships with faculty, you want to count on them being there well into the future. You have made an “investment” in building a relationship with them and teaching them about your community. Ensuring that faculty are successfully promoted and recognized at their university ensures that they can stay and continue to partner with you.

As mentioned above, most faculty are rewarded and promoted based on how many grants they bring in to the university and how many journal articles they publish. Most promotion decisions are not based on the impact the faculty member makes in the community. Community partners can work to influence the criteria used in faculty evaluations for promotion and tenure to ensure they reflect a university commitment to and value of community improvement. As more community-engaged faculty members are promoted, the more likely they will become leaders at the university who can also help to push for these types of institutional changes.

Sources


Negotiating with Partners: 
Things to consider when approaching or being approached by potential partners

All of these items below are ones that you may want to negotiate with your partner when beginning a partnership or project or considering whether to begin a partnership together. Communities have the most power in negotiations at the beginning of a project, when a researcher and the community are still determining the terms of their collaboration. Once a research project has begun, it can be more difficult to negotiate changes to the project. If a researcher is asking for participation in a project that has already been funded, ask for copy of proposal or grant description and clarify what changes, if any, can be made.

Interview Potential Partners
- What are each other’s interests?
- Are the partners’ skills and experiences adequate/appropriate for the proposed project?
- Are the partners’ reputations strong within scientific field and/or community?
- Are your work styles compatible? Good communication/listening skills? Culturally competent? Willing to share power/control over decisions?
- Do you like each other?
- Do you each have enough time?
- Can you commit for the long haul?
- CBPR is not for everyone or every community or every research question. Visit http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/cbpr/u1/u14.php to find other questions that are helpful in determining is CBPR right for the potential partners.

Consider your Purpose
- Why do this project together? What is the purpose of the research? What is hoped for? What is most important?
- What impact do you want the research to have (i.e., community organizing, policy changes, increase funding)?
- How will all of the team members benefit?
- Ask questions of your self/organization: What level of involvement do we want in each part of the project? Does our organization have the capacity (staff, time, $, support from leadership)? What capacity-building may be needed?

Decision-making and Communication
- Discuss how to create the ‘glue’ for your partnership: Things that help your partnership stick together like process, infrastructure and procedures that promote and sustain trust, communication, connectedness, and meaningful work efforts that ensure each partner is respected and heard.
- How will you communicate? Meet in person? In each other’s locations? What’s the best way to reach each other (i.e. desk or cell phone, e-mail, text)?
- Decide how decisions will be made: Who will be involved in discussion? Who will be consulted? Who will make final decisions? Who should be informed of decisions? How will we share power and control? Who will run meetings/develop meeting agendas?
- Sometimes proposals, reports, or tasks must be prepared quickly in order to meet deadlines for funding or other time constraints. Negotiate time for turnaround for feedback and input (e.g. at least 1 week notice for requested letters of support).
- How often will community partners receive updates from academic partners about the progress, findings, challenges of the research?
- What are the roles and responsibilities? Who will do the work? What if the work isn’t getting done?

**Finances**
- How much money will your project cost?
- How much money will it cost to support the community and academic partners to participate?
- Discuss how money is allocated and managed. Who controls the finances? When and how will money be distributed?
- Does funding allow for indirect costs? Will community partners be compensated for their indirect costs?

**Data Ownership and Future Uses**
- Who will have access to the data?
- What rights will we have in case there are disputes about the use of the results?
- Does the funder require the data to be made publicly or to be shared with other researchers?

**Dissemination/Sharing of Results**
- How will we share the findings from our research? Who will be required to review articles or presentations before they are submitted/presented?
- How will we control or handle any impact the results may have on our community or CBO clients?
- How will we share in recognition from research findings (awards, invitations to speaking events, etc.)?
- How will we ensure that findings are shared in community venues not only scientific academic venues (academic conferences and journals)?
- How will we ensure that findings are written in community-friendly language? Reports should include a summary of the findings; resulting recommendations to the community for improvements in policies or services; benefits the research study provided to the participants and to the community as a whole; any problems that occurred in the research study; and a timeline for anticipated follow-up steps (such as papers to be submitted for publication or possible proposals for future studies that will build on the original research).

**Sustainability**
- How can we consider sustainability from the beginning? If this program or intervention is found to be successful, how will it be sustained?

**Plan for Disagreements**
- Discuss what conflicts may arise in the course of the project and partnership. What strategies will use to handle these conflicts?
  - Money: Financial losses or conflict about resource allocation
  - Past/related history, politics, turf issues

Compiled by the Alliance for Research in Chicagoland Communities (ARCC)
*Growing equitable and collaborative partnerships between Chicago area communities and Northwestern University for research that leads to measureable improvement in community health*
o Unexpected or negative results
o Insufficient communication
o Institutional rules and regulations
o Differing expectations/assumptions/priorities
o Interpersonal conflict/clashing organizational cultures
o Turnover of co-PI, project team, CBO leadership
o Discriminatory “isms” such as racism, sexism, ageism, etc.
o Power imbalances
o Commitment imbalances or unequal work loads

Document these decisions in Signed Memorandum of Understanding!

There isn’t one way of structuring partnerships – tailor the agreement to your needs.

CBPR partners are strongly encouraged to develop MOUs or some other type of written partnership document. In this document, you will find some helpful information on how to develop the organizational structure of your partnership. Having a written document which records the agreements made by the partnership is an invaluable way to minimize disagreements and can be helpful when bringing new individuals into an established partnership.

Attached are sample copies of MOU’s that have been used by other community-researcher collaborations. Having a written document which records the agreements made by the partnership is an invaluable way to minimize disagreements and can be helpful when bringing new individuals into an established partnership. The final document is a copy of the board resolution that is required in a California seed grant program application process to document that the community organization’s board of directors is aware of the agreements made by the co-PI’s with regards to: ownership of data, handling disagreements, recipient of grant award, plans for broader community involvement, and plans for dissemination of findings.

For other helpful MOU examples and topics related to CBPR partnerships, access the following websites:

- Developing and Sustaining CBPR Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum. Several sections from this curriculum can be used by teams to develop the organizational structure of their partnership [www.cbprcurriculum.info](http://www.cbprcurriculum.info)
- Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, MOU examples: [http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/commbas.html#MOU](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/commbas.html#MOU)

Sources:


COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH CENTER FACT SHEET

Information, Resources and Quick Links for Preparing and Submitting Grant Proposals to the NIH

Whether you are applying directly for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funds, or are working with another investigator who is handling the application, there are many requirements for NIH proposals that are best taken care of in advance. While it can be time consuming, figuring out the NIH maze is well worth the effort. These steps will allow members of your organization to apply for funds as investigators (as opposed to “other significant personnel”) and will allow your organization to apply directly for funds (as opposed to working with other investigators through their organizations).

Organizations submitting grant proposals to the NIH need to have a Central Contractor Registration (CCR) registration, an organizational Data Universal Number (DUNS) and individuals within those organizations submitting grant proposals as principal investigators (PIs) need to have Electronic Research Administration (eRA) Commons IDs. Organization representatives signing off on grant proposals need to have Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) designations. The process for registering for these identification numbers takes several weeks and coordination with departments inside your organization. There are also software and hardware requirements for submitting grant proposals. Here is a checklist and a list of websites to go to for information on how to register and submit proposals (with helpful tips along the way).

Your Organization’s DUNS Number

Many of the processes below require your organization’s Data Universal Number (DUNS). The DUNS is a unique nine-character identification number provided by the commercial company, Dun and Bradstreet (D&B). If your organization has one, it can be found on this website: http://www.dnb.com/US/duns_update/

To obtain a DUNS number, go to this website: (You should not apply for a DUNS number without involving your organization’s administrative office.) http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/displayHomePage.do

eRA Commons Identifications (Organization and Individual)

If you have been or think you will be working on a grant proposal going in to the NIH, register for an eRA Commons ID now. This is the single most important identifier required of the NIH for individual investigators. In order to do this, your organization has to register in the eRA Commons database (if they haven’t already). The only person that can register your organization is the person that is able to sign contracts and financial documents for your agency, usually the CEO, CFO or grants officer. (This person will usually become your Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). The link to register your organization is here: https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/registration/registrationInstructions.jsp;

Once the account is created, there is a person in charge of assigning eRA Commons IDs in your organization, and that person will request one for you. Your AOR will either act in this role or assign this task to someone in your organization. This entire process can take 2-4 weeks.

General Questions about eRA Commons IDs for your organization or individuals needing IDs can be answered here: http://era.nih.gov/commons/faq_commons.cfm

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Growing equitable and collaborative partnerships between Chicago area communities and Northwestern University for research that leads to measureable improvement in community health
Northwestern University can also request an eRA Commons ID for community partners submitting proposals. (This process requires you to submit your name and social security number to NU.) If you would like assistance with this, contact the Administrative Director of CERC or the program staff within CERC can also coordinate this with you.

**Grants.gov Registration**

To submit proposals directly from your organization to the NIH often requires electronic submission through grants.gov. Here is a good website to visit regarding this process (it provides links to the hardware and software needed for applications, as well as tells you which applications can still be submitted on paper – not many!): [http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/faq_prepare.htm#1](http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/faq_prepare.htm#1)

Grants.gov requires Central Contractor Registration (CCR) [https://www.bpn.gov/ccr/default.aspx](https://www.bpn.gov/ccr/default.aspx) before you can register on the Grants.gov website: [http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp). The CCR is a government-wide registry for vendors doing business with the federal government. The CCR centralizes information about grant recipients and also provides a central location for grant recipients to change organization information. Grants.gov uses the CCR to establish roles and IDs for electronic grant applicants.

There is a handy user guide, as well as an on-line tutorial, on how to register on Grants.gov ([http://www.grants.gov/assets/OrgRegUserGuide.pdf](http://www.grants.gov/assets/OrgRegUserGuide.pdf)) which will answer any questions you may have.

CCR Registration takes 3-5 business days to process, and Grants.gov registration can take up to 4 weeks.

**Negotiating Indirect Cost Agreements**

Grant proposals permit applicants to budget for costs directly related to the project described in the grant. Indirect costs are not permitted in the budget. Indirect costs are items that cannot be directly tied to the project itself. Examples of indirect costs are: Computers, internet access costs, administrative assistant salary, utilities, rent, copies, and general office supplies.

A negotiated indirect rate is a formula that the federal government uses, based on audited financial records of your organization, to account for these costs as a part of your grant proposal.

When applying for federal grants, agencies and organizations that have a negotiated indirect cost rate can include a percentage of direct costs as part of the grant proposal to cover indirect costs. Without this negotiated rate, these indirect costs are not allowed.

The Federal Government negotiates indirect rates with non-profits, educational institutions and small businesses. The agency that negotiates indirect rates for health and human service agencies is the Department of Health and Human Services. [http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/background.html](http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/background.html)

To find out if you have a negotiated indirect rate with the DHHS, go to this website: [http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/new_search.html](http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/new_search.html)

To submit an indirect rate proposal for a non-profit organization for health and human services related purposes: [http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/np1.html](http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/np1.html)
A very good Q&A can be found here: http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/faq-general.pdf
Contact information for the Midwest is found here: http://rates.psc.gov/fms/dca/central.html

Negotiating indirect cost rates can take weeks or months – this process should be initiated very early. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health held a Community Partner Educational Conference Call on June 3, 2009 on the “why and how” of obtaining a federally negotiated indirect rate, a federal wide assurance for human subjects research and registration through grants.gov and NIH eRACommons. Access the call audio file and handouts at http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/past-presentations.html (scroll down to June 3rd date to find materials).

For more information or questions related to these topics, contact:

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The Community-Engaged Research Center (CERC) is committed to improving community health by facilitating collaborative research partnerships that include Chicago-area organizations, community-based clinicians and Northwestern University academic partners. One of five centers of the Northwestern University Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute, the Community-Engaged Research Center is a key contributor to its mission of translational research, ensuring that advances from the bench to the bedside benefit the Chicago-area community and result in lasting improvements in community health.

For more information about the Community-Engaged Research Center, please visit: http://www.nucats.northwestern.edu/centers/cerc/index.html