

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT TOPIC	Research for Equity and Power (REP): Developing a Community Engaged Research Partnership to address Community Identified Issues	
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OVERVIEW	<p>Low-income neighborhoods across the country are facing increasing pressures from neighborhood change, with gentrification occurring at twice the rate of the 1990s (e.g., including critical affordable housing shortages and rapid increases in home values), and wealth inequality among neighborhoods is rising (Maciag, 2015; Pendall & Hedman, 2015). Pittsburgh is facing similar pressures, including a shortage of 17,241 affordable units and significant increases in monthly rents from \$500 to \$794 and average housing values from \$76,700 to \$120,000 since 2007 (Keppler, 2017). Given these pressures, engaging residents around equitable development is critical to ensuring that all residents participate in and benefit from Pittsburgh’s economic transformation, especially communities that have historically faced the greatest inequities (Treuhaft, 2016).</p> <p>Sutton (2014) argues that equitable development is fostered through “revitalization:” neighborhood change done from the bottom up with residents. Citizen engagement strategies ensure residents have an active role in their communities, which can also positively influence their health and wellbeing (Choi, 2019). Engaging youth and adults can also increase trust, social cohesion and community improvement (Camino, 2005; Zeldin et al., 2013).</p> <p>While research shows that community development improves health and wellbeing, inclusive and equitable community development takes time, and neighborhoods are changing more quickly than residents can adapt. Deliberate strategies are needed to equip residents with the tools they need to influence equitable development.</p>
PROJECT GOALS	The goal of our project is to actively engage youth and adult Homewood residents in a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) project to foster civic engagement in and influence over equitable development in Homewood.
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS	In 2016, Neighborhood Allies and PolicyLink engaged community leaders to develop an Equitable Development Strategy for Pittsburgh (Treuhaft, 2016); however, they recognized the need to more deeply engage residents. Like other cities, Pittsburgh has developed plans with the best intentions for inclusion but have fallen short on implementation. In the meantime, development has not halted, and like other cities neighborhoods are changing more quickly than residents can adapt. This research aims to understand and foster youth and adult residents’ influence on equitable development and revitalization, including: (a) residents’ lived experiences, (b) neighborhood change (e.g., implementation of development plans, housing costs), and (c) perceptions of policy/decision makers regarding residents’ influence.
PROJECT COMPONENTS	<p>Our current Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) project in Pittsburgh’s Homewood neighborhood is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging 30 youth and adult residents in gaining insight on residents’ perceived power to tackle equitable development issues through a series of eight structured Community Conversations • empowering residents to develop an Advocacy Roadmap and Playbook that will guide how they can influence neighborhood change, and • working with participants to develop and implement a Citizen Training Academy to train other residents. <p>We are using CBPR because it focuses on creating power among participants that can be used to direct resources and influence policies to benefit the community (Israel et al., 1988). Through structured conversations, residents will discuss ways to foster their own agency around equitable development and identify barriers to and facilitators of civic engagement around these issues. Further, we will produce relevant data on how residents can effectively influence policy/decision makers.</p>

<p>COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP APPROACH</p>	<p>Our collaborative approach is threaded throughout the structure our project: A resident driven Community Advisory Board (CAB); a Community Researcher (a resident who was hired as part our research team); and youth and adult resident researchers and advocates as our participants in the project. We are using CBPR principles and methods to advance our collaborative goals. The CAB and research team review and refine the research questions, design, and plans for analysis, interpretation, and dissemination, which is ensured through the careful planning of training around participatory research methods, an assessment of current capacity to analyze and interpret results, and training and support available to enable our team members to be the primary agents in this project.</p> <p>In all the ways discussed here, the principles and goals of CBPR are threaded throughout the project (Hacker, 2013; Branom, 2012), including building on the strengths and resources in the community, cultural competence and humility, collaborative and equitable partnerships, co-learning, knowledge generation for mutual benefit and intervention, understanding the local relevance of the problem and the multiple social determinants of health that affect it.</p>
<p>RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND EVALUATION METHODS</p>	<p>This project uses CBPR principles and mixed methods to examine:</p> <p>(1) Residents’ lived experiences: In what ways does civic engagement around equitable development strengthen participants’ sense of agency, perceived empowerment, efficacy and perceived community well-being? (Methods: focus groups and pre-post surveys with residents engaged in Community Conversations and Citizen Training Academy)</p> <p>(2) Neighborhood change: How are residents influencing the implementation of equitable development, particularly in current plans? (Methods: data on the implementation of equitable development strategies and projects and neighborhood housing costs (two years prior and two years during the project).</p> <p>(3) Inclusion in policy decisions: How are residents influencing policymakers’ decisions on equitable development? (Methods: interviews on how resident civic engagement influences their decisions and actions).</p>
<p>VISION</p>	<p>Our research can advance knowledge on how residents can influence equitable development. Neighborhood and city-wide decision makers could use the results to advance healthier and more equitable communities. Our research could positively influence community development organizations and the implementation of equitable development goals, and those who influence equitable development policies (e.g., Neighborhood Allies; Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition; city and county agencies, etc.). Our research team will contribute to the evidence on the impact of resident citizen engagement for communities across the country struggling with how to influence neighborhood change in ways that benefit current residents.</p>
<p>CONCLUSION</p>	<p>Our project is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that funds AmeriCorps and Vista. There are extremely limited federal funding sources that support Community Engaged and CPBR research projects. This is a huge challenge for community oriented and engaged scholars, so more work needs to be done to advocate for resources and support for this type of research.</p>
<p>REFERENCES</p>	<p>Branom, C. (2012). Community-based participatory research as a social work research and intervention approach. <i>Journal of Community Practice</i>, 20(3), 260-273.</p> <p>Camino, L. (2005). Pitfalls and promising practices of youth–adult partnerships: An evaluator’s reflections. <i>Journal of Community Psychology</i>, 33(1), 75-85.</p> <p>Choi, L. (2019, January 30). Mental Health and Community Development. Retrieved from https://shelterforce.org/2019/01/24/mental-health-and-community-development/</p> <p>Hacker, K. (2013). <i>Community-Based Participatory Research</i>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.</p> <p>Israel, B. A., Schultz, A.J., Parker, E.A., & Becker, A.B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. <i>Annual Review of Public Health</i>, 19, 173-202.</p> <p>Keppler, N. (2017). What you need to know about affordable housing (or lack thereof) in Pittsburgh. <i>Public Source</i>, February 23, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.publicsource.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-affordable-housing-or-lack-thereof-in-pittsburgh/?platform=hootsuite</p>

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