



BUILD BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

A Field Guide for University Researchers
Partnering with Communities for Transformative
Research

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Table of Contents

Part I: Foundations	1
Introduction	
Guiding Principles	
Situating Yourself: Researcher Positionality	
Part II: Preparing for Partnership	8
Ethical Frameworks Beyond IRB	
Building Trust and Beginning Relationships	
Co-Creating Research Questions and Design	
Part III: Doing the Work Together	16
Methods for Collaborative Data Collection	
Deliverables and Community Accountability	
Part IV: After the Project	20
Sustaining Relationships	
Evaluation & Reflection	
Appendix	26

Part I: Foundations

1. Introduction

- Purpose and vision of the guide

This field guide emerges from the urgent need to transform extractive academic research practices that have historically marginalized communities while advancing institutional careers. Drawing from collaborative experiences with frontline communities in Southern California and Indigenous Nations in Northern Arizona, this resource responds directly to community requests for practical guidance on respectful and effective university-community partnerships.

The guide's vision centers on authentic reciprocity, shared power, and sustained relationships that extend beyond project timelines. Rather than treating communities as research subjects, this framework positions residents as co-researchers and knowledge holders whose expertise is essential for addressing complex social and environmental challenges. The guide challenges neoliberal academic structures that prioritize rapid publication over community benefit, offering alternative approaches grounded in research justice principles.

The purpose of this guide is to equip researchers with concrete tools, frameworks, and reflection processes that support genuinely transformative partnerships. By bridging academic rigor with community priorities, this guide aims to cultivate research relationships that strengthen community capacity while generating knowledge that serves collective liberation and social justice.

- What is community-based research?

Community-engaged research spans a spectrum based on the level of community participation in academic partnerships. This method shifts traditional "fieldwork" into "homework," often requiring researchers to become deeply involved in communities rather than leaving immediately after data collection, a common practice in Western academic traditions (Mora, 2017). While this ongoing engagement may seem demanding to some researchers, it consistently leads to higher-quality research results.

At one end of the spectrum lies Participatory Action Research (PAR), where community partners collaborate as equals with academic researchers throughout every phase of the research process. This includes co-developing research questions, designing methodologies, collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting findings (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). PAR represents the fullest expression of shared power and collaborative knowledge production, ensuring that research serves community priorities while maintaining academic rigor through genuine partnership rather than extractive consultation. However, there are many forms of community-based research with varying degrees of participation from community partners.

- Why is this guide necessary now?

Amid growing social, environmental, and racial inequities, research must do more than document and identify problems; it must promote justice, accountability, and meaningful change. This field guide equips scholars and practitioners with practical tools and ethical frameworks to engage communities respectfully and effectively. In this moment of urgent calls for decolonization, equity, and climate resilience, such a guide is vital for ensuring research contributes to transformative, reciprocal, and contextually grounded solutions.

2. Guiding Principles

- Reciprocity

In community-engaged research, transparency and reciprocity are essential. Reciprocity is a core principle that fundamentally changes the relationship between academic institutions and communities from extractive to mutually beneficial partnerships. This principle addresses longstanding power imbalances and ethical concerns that have historically characterized university-community research relationships.

Reciprocity in community-engaged research involves a two-way exchange of benefits, knowledge, and resources between academic researchers and community partners. Unlike traditional research models, where benefits mainly go to the academy, reciprocal strategies ensure that communities gain real value from their involvement (Israel et al., 2013). This includes shared decision-making, capacity building, resource sharing, and results that directly address community-identified priorities.

The emphasis on reciprocity came from criticisms of exploitative research practices, especially in marginalized communities. These communities have long been used as research subjects without much benefit from studies in their neighborhoods. This exploitative approach continued what Freire (1970) referred to as "banking education," where knowledge flows only from so-called experts to recipients.

Reciprocity addresses several ethical concerns in community research. First, it ensures that communities are not just data sources but active partners in creating knowledge. This aligns with principles of distributive justice, ensuring that research benefits are shared fairly among those who contribute to the process (Wallerstein et al., 2018). Second, reciprocity respects community autonomy and self-determination by involving residents in shaping research questions, methodologies, and how findings are used, treating them as equals in the research process.

Trust is the foundation of successful community-engaged research, and reciprocity acts as both a trust-building mechanism and a result of established trust. Feminist scholars even argue that reciprocal dialogue between outsiders and insiders enhances the credibility of outsiders' accounts (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). When communities observe tangible benefits from research partnerships, such as capacity building, policy changes, or resource acquisition, they

are more likely to participate genuinely in future collaborations (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). This trust is especially vital in communities with histories of exploitation or marginalization.

Reciprocal relationships enhance research quality through various mechanisms. Community partners provide deep knowledge of local conditions, cultural nuances, and practical constraints that external researchers may overlook. This insider insight improves the validity and relevance of research findings (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Furthermore, community investment in research outcomes boosts the chances of honest participation and decreases response bias.

Despite its importance, implementing reciprocity faces significant challenges. Academic reward systems often prioritize publication over community benefit, creating tensions for researchers. Time constraints and funding limitations can make it difficult to provide meaningful reciprocal benefits. Additionally, power imbalances rooted in educational, economic, and social differences can persist even within supposedly reciprocal relationships (Muhammad et al., 2015).

- Power-sharing

Power sharing represents a fundamental paradigm shift in community-engaged research, moving beyond traditional hierarchical research models toward collaborative partnerships where decision-making authority is distributed among all stakeholders. This transformation addresses historical inequities in research relationships and creates more democratic, effective, and sustainable approaches to knowledge production in both rural and urban communities.

Power sharing directly addresses structural inequities that have historically marginalized certain communities from knowledge production processes. By redistributing research authority, power sharing challenges academic monopolies on legitimate knowledge and creates space for alternative ways of knowing. This is particularly important for communities that have been historically excluded from mainstream research or whose knowledge systems have been devalued by academic institutions (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

The emphasis on power sharing emerged from critiques of extractive research practices that treated communities as subjects rather than partners. Traditional research models reflected broader colonial and paternalistic relationships, where academic institutions extracted knowledge from communities without providing commensurate benefits or decision-making authority (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Community-based participatory research (CBPR) and similar approaches were developed as responses to these power imbalances, with power sharing serving as a mechanism for democratizing knowledge production.

Power sharing draws from multiple theoretical frameworks, including Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue and shared authority in knowledge creation. Freire's concept of "co-investigation" suggests that meaningful research requires the active participation of those whose realities are being studied (Freire, 1970). Additionally, feminist epistemology contributes insights about situated knowledge and the importance of including marginalized voices in research processes (Haraway, 1988).

When enacted, power sharing addresses several ethical concerns in community research. It upholds principles of justice by ensuring that those most affected by research have meaningful input into research processes. It respects community autonomy and self-determination by involving residents in defining research agendas and methodologies. It also addresses issues of exploitation by ensuring that communities are not merely sources of data but active partners in knowledge creation (Dickson & Green, 2001).

- Relationship building

Long-term relationship building is a cornerstone of effective community-engaged research, distinguishing authentic partnerships from transactional research encounters. This sustained approach to collaboration recognizes that meaningful social change and knowledge production require time, trust, and iterative engagement that extends far beyond individual research projects. In my field of urban planning, where complex challenges intersect with deeply embedded social, economic, and political dynamics, long-term relationships become essential for generating impactful and sustainable outcomes.

Trust becomes the key currency in long-term research relationships, growing through consistent actions, transparent communication, moments of vulnerability, and clear commitment to community priorities. Trust cannot be built quickly or for instrumental reasons; it needs ongoing interaction, shared experiences, and proof of mutual respect and benefit (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). In communities with histories of exploitation by outside researchers, establishing trust may take years of relationship-building before meaningful collaboration happens. This process involves showing reliability, persistence, keeping promises, and “showing up” for the community while respecting their knowledge and expertise.

Relationship building in community-engaged research sometimes involves sustained, multi-year commitments between academic institutions and community partners that go beyond specific research projects or funding cycles. These relationships are marked by ongoing dialogue, mutual learning, shared decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving that develop over time (Israel et al., 2013). Unlike one-off research encounters, long-term relationships allow partners to develop a deep understanding of each other's perspectives, capacities, and constraints while increasing collective ability to address complex challenges.

Sustained relationships foster iterative learning and adaptation that can't happen in brief research encounters. As partners collaborate across multiple projects and funding cycles, they gain a deeper understanding of each other's strengths, challenges, and working styles. This learning process enables continuous improvement of collaborative methods, approaches, and outcomes (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Communities can offer ongoing feedback on research processes and results, while academics can adjust their approaches based on community insights and changing circumstances.

- Accountability to community needs

Accountability to community needs in community-engaged research involves ongoing responsiveness to community-identified priorities, concerns, and desired outcomes throughout all phases of the research process. This accountability extends beyond simple consultation to include genuine incorporation of community perspectives into research design, implementation, analysis, and application of findings (Wallerstein et al., 2018). It requires researchers to set aside their research interests to community needs when conflicts arise and to demonstrate concrete ways that research activities advance community goals and priorities. I typically do not lead with a research idea but focus on learning more about the challenges facing the community I am supporting, and let research opportunities arise organically.

The emphasis on accountability to community needs emerged from decades of research that served academic careers and institutional interests while providing little benefit to participating communities. This pattern was particularly pronounced in marginalized communities, where researchers often studied problems without consulting residents about their priorities or desired solutions. The resulting disconnect between research agendas and community needs perpetuated power imbalances and contributed to community skepticism about academic partnerships (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

True accountability to community needs requires that research agendas emerge from community-identified priorities rather than researcher interests or funding opportunities. This involves participatory processes for identifying research questions, setting priorities, and defining desired outcomes. Community members should have meaningful input into what problems are studied, how they are investigated, and what solutions are pursued (Israel et al., 2013). This community-driven approach ensures that research addresses issues that matter to residents rather than problems that academics find theoretically interesting but lack practical application. Research outcomes can only be truly transformative if they lead to practical, real-world applications.

Accountability to community needs often requires researchers to adopt culturally appropriate methods that align with community values, communication styles, and ways of knowing. This might involve including Indigenous research methods, employing participatory approaches that value experiential knowledge, or adapting data collection techniques to respect cultural norms and preferences (Wallerstein et al., 2019). Researchers must be willing to learn from community members about suitable ways to conduct research in their contexts.

Accountable research focuses on problems that communities identify as priorities rather than issues that researchers or funders consider important. This requires extensive community engagement to understand local perspectives on problems, their causes, and potential solutions. Researchers must invest time in learning about community contexts, listening to resident concerns, and understanding local priorities before developing research proposals (Schulz et al., 2003). This community-centered problem identification ensures that research addresses issues that matter to residents and have potential for meaningful impact.

Adapting to community needs requires flexible research designs that can shift with changing community priorities and circumstances. This responsiveness might involve modifying research questions based on community feedback, adjusting methodologies to capture community experiences better, or shifting focus areas as new needs emerge. Researchers must be prepared to abandon predetermined research plans when community needs point in different directions (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). This flexibility requires both methodological sophistication and genuine commitment to community priorities over academic preferences.

- Cultural humility

I was inspired to create this field guide after my own research experiences collaborating with frontline communities in predominantly Latine and immigrant working-class cities of Southern California and Indigenous Nations in Northern Arizona. In multiple instances, community members expressed a desire for a training manual to guide institutional actors and researchers on how to communicate respectfully and effectively with frontline community members in research and community development projects.

Cultural humility represents a transformative approach to community-engaged research that fundamentally reorients researchers' relationships with communities from positions of assumed expertise to stances of respectful learning and collaborative inquiry. Unlike cultural competence, which implies mastery of cultural knowledge, cultural humility emphasizes ongoing self-reflection, power analysis, and commitment to lifelong learning about a given community's lived experiences, values, and ways of knowing. In urban planning contexts, where research often intersects with diverse communities that have experienced historical marginalization and where planning decisions profoundly impact daily life, cultural humility becomes essential for conducting ethical, respectful, and effective community-engaged scholarship.

Cultural humility recognizes that community members possess sophisticated knowledge about their own experiences, contexts, and needs that may not be captured through traditional academic approaches. This includes experiential knowledge, cultural wisdom, survival strategies, and local insights that are essential for understanding complex socioeconomic and political dynamics. Researchers practicing cultural humility approach communities as teachers and collaborators rather than subjects or beneficiaries (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

Community-based researchers must recognize that individuals and communities have multiple, intersecting identities that shape their experiences in complex ways. Rather than focusing on single identity categories, cultural humility embraces intersectional understanding that considers how race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, and other factors interact to create unique experiences and perspectives. This intersectional awareness prevents oversimplification of community experiences and recognizes internal diversity within communities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Central to cultural humility is ongoing self-reflection about researchers' social locations, biases, privileges, and limitations. This involves examining how factors such as race, class, gender,

education, and institutional affiliation shape researchers' perspectives and interactions with communities. Researchers must honestly assess their own cultural backgrounds, assumptions, and potential blind spots while remaining open to feedback about how their positionality affects research relationships (Muhammad et al., 2015). This self-reflection is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing process that continues throughout research partnerships.

- Open knowledge and access

The emphasis on open knowledge and access emerged from critiques of academic knowledge systems that have historically excluded communities from accessing research conducted in their neighborhoods. Traditional academic publishing models create barriers to access through subscription fees, technical language, and institutional requirements that effectively exclude community members from benefiting from research in which they participated. This exclusion represents a form of knowledge colonialism, where academic institutions extract knowledge from communities while restricting community access to research outputs (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

Open knowledge and access align with democratic principles that emphasize public access to information and transparent governance. Knowledge justice frameworks argue that communities have fundamental rights to access information that affects their lives and to participate in knowledge production processes. This includes the right to understand how research is conducted, to access research findings, and to use research outputs for community benefit without restriction (Okune et al., 2018). Knowledge justice recognizes that information asymmetries perpetuate power imbalances and that democratizing access to knowledge is essential for social justice.

Open knowledge and access must be balanced with principles of community ownership and data sovereignty, particularly for Indigenous communities and marginalized populations. While openness is generally beneficial, communities should retain control over sensitive information, cultural knowledge, and data that could be misused or appropriated. Community data sovereignty ensures that communities have authority over how their data is collected, stored, shared, and used (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). This requires nuanced approaches to openness that respect community preferences and protect vulnerable populations.

True open access requires more than simply making research available; it demands accessible communication that translates academic findings into formats that communities can understand and use. This includes writing in plain language, creating visual summaries, producing materials in multiple languages, and using community-preferred communication channels. Accessible communication recognizes that technical jargon and academic writing styles often exclude community members from understanding research that directly affects their lives (Israel et al., 2013).

Open knowledge and access require producing research outputs in multiple formats that serve different community needs and preferences. This might include traditional academic publications, community reports, policy briefs, infographics, art, videos, podcasts, or interactive

websites. Different formats serve different purposes: academic publications contribute to scholarly discourse, while community reports provide accessible summaries for local use. The choice of formats should be guided by community preferences and intended uses (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011).

3. Situating Yourself: Researcher Positionality

- Reflection

“We are inclined to think of reflection as something quiet and personal. My argument here is that reflection is action-oriented, social and political. Its ‘product’ is praxis (informed, committed action), the most eloquent and socially significant form of human action.”
(Kemmis, 1985, p. 141)

Researcher positionality is fundamental to community-based research because it directly influences every aspect of the research process, from the questions asked to how data is interpreted and whose voices are prioritized. For Mora, “critical self-reflection [is] a necessary part of any research project without reproducing the colonial gaze that serves to maintain social hierarchies” (2017, p. 48). She explains that continuously questioning and reflecting on one’s role as a researcher and a representative of an academic institution helps us understand “differences amongst research and subject, [and how] they reflect different articulations of power.” (p. 48). She urges researchers to recognize and challenge these power dynamics. To assist researchers in reflecting on their various social positions, I have provided a set of worksheets below as tools to examine their positionality and other important reflections in community-based research.

Toolkit:

- A. Researcher Positionality (Appendix A)
 - B. Reflection Questions in Community-Based Research (Appendix B)
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Part II: Preparing for Partnership

4. Ethical Frameworks Beyond IRB

- Indigenous data sovereignty

Indigenous data sovereignty asserts the rights of Native nations and Indigenous Peoples to govern the collection, ownership, and application of their own data. Indigenous data sovereignty derives from tribes' inherent right to govern their peoples, lands, and resources (<https://nni.arizona.edu/our-work/research-policy-analysis/indigenous-data-sovereignty-governance>). Indigenous data sovereignty is the right of Indigenous Peoples to govern data that is collected by, from, or about them (<https://libraryguides.unh.edu/c.php?g=1326390&p=9764587>). This concept extends beyond

simple data ownership to encompass the entire research lifecycle, from question formulation to data collection, analysis, storage, and application. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is the ability for Indigenous peoples, communities, and Nations to participate, steward, and control data that is created with or about themselves. The term sovereignty refers to the fact that Indigenous Nations are sovereign in their governance, and that extends to data governance.

One of the most significant advancements in operationalizing Indigenous data sovereignty has been the development of the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance. CARE was created in 2019 by the International Indigenous Data Sovereignty Interest Group, a group that is a part of the Research Data Alliance. It outlines collective rights related to open data in the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous data sovereignty. CARE is an acronym that stands for Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics (<https://www.gida-global.org/care-principles-copy>).

Many Indigenous communities have developed data governance frameworks to guide research data management. These frameworks respond to and stand against unethical, extractive, deficit-based, and harmful research practices (<https://research.ucalgary.ca/engage-research/indigenous-research-support-team/irst-resources/indigenous-data-sovereignty>). The history of research in Indigenous communities has been marked by exploitation, misrepresentation, and the appropriation of traditional knowledge without consent or benefit to communities. Indigenous data sovereignty frameworks directly challenge these historical patterns by:

1. Centering Indigenous epistemologies: Recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems as valid and complete ways of understanding the world
2. Ensuring community benefit: Requiring that research serve Indigenous community priorities and needs
3. Protecting cultural integrity: Safeguarding sacred or sensitive knowledge from inappropriate use
4. Building Indigenous research capacity: Supporting Indigenous researchers and community-controlled research infrastructure

We'll explore ways to operationalize Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Part Three below.

- Relational ethics

Relational ethics signals a significant shift from traditional research ethics toward approaches that prioritize relationships, reciprocity, and ongoing accountability throughout the research process. In community-engaged urban planning research, relational ethics provides a more culturally responsive and ethically grounded framework that recognizes research as inherently relational rather than extractive. In my field, this approach is especially important given urban planning's history of top-down interventions that have caused significant harm to marginalized communities.

Critical to Indigenous methodologies is the concept of relational accountability, or what is most “important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is,

being accountable to your relations" (Carroll et al., 2021). Relational accountability is inherently reflexive and responsive, moving with the rhythms of our research relationships rather than following rigid procedural protocols (<https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/blog/care-principles-operationalising-indigenous-data-governance/>). It requires researchers to consider how their work affects not just individual participants but entire community networks and future generations.

Unlike traditional research ethics that end when data collection concludes, relational ethics establishes ongoing responsibilities that continue throughout the research lifecycle and beyond. Researchers have continuing obligations to communities, including sharing results, supporting community priorities, and maintaining relationships over time.

Community-engaged methods were created by and for communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latine communities, to assert their right to be part of decisions that affect their lives. By including people with lived experience as experts and decision-makers, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can more equitably partner with communities to change the systems that negatively impact their lives (<https://nni.arizona.edu/our-work/research-policy-analysis/indigenous-data-sovereignty-governance>).

- Consent as an ongoing process

The concept of consent in community-engaged research has evolved significantly from the traditional biomedical model of one-time informed consent toward more dynamic, relational approaches that recognize consent as an ongoing process throughout the research lifecycle. In urban planning research, where interventions often have long-term community impacts and research relationships may last over extended periods of time, treating consent as a continuous process rather than a singular event is both ethically imperative and practically necessary for meaningful community engagement.

A shift toward community-directed participation uncovers several problems with traditional consent models:

1. Unpredictability of Community Research: Community-driven research often involves emergent questions and evolving methodologies that cannot be fully anticipated at the research outset
2. Changing Community Priorities: Community needs and priorities may shift over time, requiring research to adapt accordingly
3. Collective vs. Individual Consent: Communities may need to make collective decisions about research participation that transcend individual consent
4. Long-term Relationship Building: Meaningful community engagement requires sustained relationships that evolve over time

Ongoing consent acknowledges that meaningful consent necessitates continuous dialogue, relationship-building, and mutual decision-making throughout the research process. Rather than

viewing consent as a one-time legal requirement, this approach treats consent as an expression of an ongoing relationship and mutual respect between researchers and communities.

The implementation of ongoing consent requires significant changes in how researchers, institutions, and communities approach research relationships. This includes developing new protocols, training programs, and institutional policies that support long-term relationship building and community governance of research. Treating consent as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event represents a fundamental shift toward more ethical, respectful, and effective community-engaged research.

- Community-defined harms and benefits

Community-defined approaches are particularly important for addressing historical research harms, especially in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods that have historically experienced extractive research practices. Minkler and Wallerstein (2011) document how communities have been over-researched but under-served, with studies that pathologized communities without addressing structural inequities. By centering community definitions, researchers can work to repair these relationships and ensure that research contributes to community-determined goals.

In urban planning research, community-defined harms and benefits manifest in various ways. For example, communities might define transportation improvements not just in terms of efficiency or modal split, but in terms of safety, affordability, and cultural accessibility. Environmental benefits might be understood through concepts of environmental justice that consider cumulative impacts and community resilience rather than single-issue improvements.

Corburn (2005) demonstrates how community knowledge about environmental health issues often reveals connections between built environment factors and health outcomes that technical assessments might miss. Residents may understand air quality impacts through their children's asthma rates, for example, providing crucial insights for planning interventions.

Community-defined harms and benefits require researchers to adopt methodological approaches that genuinely share power and decision-making authority. Cargo and Mercer (2008) outline how participatory action research creates spaces for communities to define research questions, data collection methods, and interpretation of findings. This process often reveals that communities understand "harm" and "benefit" through intersectional lenses that consider race, class, gender, and other identity factors simultaneously.

The concept also challenges traditional metrics of research success. Rather than relying solely on academic publications or policy recommendations, community-defined benefits might include capacity building, social cohesion, or collective efficacy development (Trickett, 2009). Communities may define research benefits as strengthening local organizations, developing leadership skills, or creating platforms for community voice in planning processes.

Wallerstein et al. (2018) emphasize that community-defined frameworks are essential for addressing health and social inequities, as they ensure that research addresses issues that communities themselves identify as priorities. In urban planning contexts, this might mean that residents define gentrification pressures, environmental hazards, or transportation barriers differently than planners or policymakers may assume.

Implementing community-defined frameworks also presents some challenges. Researchers must navigate tensions between community priorities and academic or funder expectations. Additionally, communities are not homogeneous, and different groups may define harms and benefits differently, requiring careful attention to whose voices are centered and whose might be marginalized. The concept of community-defined harms and benefits represents a critical evolution in research practice that aligns with principles of research justice and democratic participation.

5. Building Trust and Beginning Relationships

- Protocols for engagement

When seeking to work with a community partner, it is critical to define crystal clear roles and expectations. One's role as a researcher and the accompanying expectations may shift over time, so it is important to check in periodically. Protocols for engagement in community-engaged research serve as essential frameworks that establish the foundation for ethical, effective, and equitable partnerships between researchers and communities. Engagement protocols in community-based participatory research (CBPR) represent more than procedural guidelines; they embody principles of democratic participation, research justice, and community self-determination.

Israel et al. (2013) emphasize that effective protocols must recognize the community as a unit of identity while building on existing strengths and resources within neighborhoods. This foundational understanding ensures that engagement processes honor community knowledge and avoid deficit-based approaches that have historically characterized planning interventions.

The significance of well-designed protocols extends beyond methodological considerations to address power dynamics inherent in university-community partnerships. Wallerstein et al. (2018) argue that protocols must explicitly address how decision-making authority is shared, how conflicts are resolved, and how benefits are distributed throughout the research process. Establishing trust in this context requires protocols that prioritize transparency in all aspects of the research process. This includes clear communication about research purposes, methods, timeline, and potential risks or benefits. Minkler and Wallerstein (2011) emphasize that trust-building is an ongoing process that requires sustained commitment and regular opportunities for community members to provide feedback and redirect research activities.

One tool I have found to be particularly productive in identifying goals and refining subsequent action steps required to reach said goals is the POP model. As a graduate student, I was first introduced to the POP model by Abby Reyes at the University of California, Irvine, during my

time as a Global Food Initiative fellow from 2015 to 2017. I have since utilized this simple yet potent tool in various settings with community partners. Co-creating POPs with your community partner is a valuable and enriching exercise, and helps to open up conversations around goal setting, desired outcomes, and each member's roles. I have provided a guide on the POP model in the worksheets section below.

Communication protocols should establish multiple channels for information sharing, recognizing that different community members may prefer different communication methods. This might include community meetings, newsletters, group chats, social media, or informal networks. Regular communication rhythms help maintain engagement while respecting community members' time and other commitments.

Meetings often become the most frequent sites of interaction between academic researchers and community partners. It is important to use meeting time wisely and understand that part of the meeting process is to create bonds and develop relationships while getting work done. One way to do this systematically is by utilizing check-ins to start regular meetings. In my experience researching and organizing with urban farm and garden organizations, we often used food and plant-related check-ins such as "Rose, Bud, Thorn" or "What's your favorite food and why?" These small activities can open up channels of communication and become essential bonding activities for participants as they get to know each other on a more personal level. It is also a good practice to rotate the person who facilitates meetings regularly as a mechanism for power sharing in small group settings. Participating in these seemingly mundane activities (i.e., check-ins, rotating facilitator) becomes a critical relationship and trust-building process that brings the researcher closer to community partners.

- Community timelines vs. academic timelines

The tension between community timelines and academic timelines represents one of the most significant challenges in community-engaged research, reflecting deeper structural inequities between academic institutions and the communities they study. This temporal mismatch can undermine the very principles of participatory research and highlights the need for fundamental shifts in how research is conceived, funded, and implemented.

Academic timelines are typically structured around institutional requirements, e.g., semester schedules, funding cycles, dissertation deadlines, and tenure requirements. These timelines often prioritize efficiency and predetermined outcomes, reflecting what Minkler and Wallerstein (2011) describe as the "academic imperative" to produce knowledge quickly for publication and career advancement. In contrast, community timelines are embedded in the lived realities of residents dealing with immediate survival needs, family responsibilities, work schedules, and ongoing community crises. This temporal investment is not merely procedural but represents the foundation for meaningful partnership and authentic knowledge co-creation. In any community organizing or collective action setting, Adrienne Marie Brown (2017) suggests that we "move the speed of trust" (p. 41).

The mismatch between community and academic timelines has profound implications for both research quality and ethical practice. When academic timelines dominate, research may proceed without adequate community input, leading to findings that do not reflect community priorities or knowledge. This temporal colonialism reproduces extractive research practices that have historically harmed communities.

Corburn (2005) demonstrates how extended engagement periods allow researchers to understand the complex relationships between environmental conditions, community knowledge, and health outcomes that more accelerated assessments might miss.

Flexible research designs that can adapt to community rhythms and priorities represent another important approach. Rather than rigid protocols, researchers can develop frameworks that accommodate changing community needs while maintaining research rigor. This might include multiple entry points for community participation and iterative processes that allow for ongoing refinement of research questions and methods.

In other cases, long-term partnerships may develop between universities and community partners. Institutions sometimes create community-based research centers that maintain ongoing relationships with neighborhoods, allowing individual research projects to build on established partnerships.

Addressing temporal disconnection requires fundamental shifts in how researchers approach community partnerships. Rather than project-based relationships, sustainable partnerships involve ongoing commitment that extends beyond specific research activities. This might include supporting community organizing efforts, providing technical assistance for grant writing, or advocating for policy changes that address community priorities.

Successful community-engaged research often involves researchers adapting their professional timelines to accommodate community needs. This might mean extending dissertation timelines, seeking flexible funding arrangements, or developing career paths that value long-term community partnership over rapid academic advancement.

The alignment of community and academic timelines represents more than a methodological consideration: it reflects fundamental questions about whose knowledge is valued, whose time is respected, and whose priorities drive research agendas. Addressing this temporal mismatch requires institutional flexibility that supports genuine partnership while maintaining the rigor and quality that characterize effective community-engaged research.

- Case example of early-stage partnerships

When I first met a community organization in Orange County, California, as a graduate student intern from the University of California, Irvine, I was asked during introductions in a large community circle what my intentions were, and “*why am I here?*” The questions caught me off guard, and I was put on the spot in front of a large group of community residents and activists.

Reflecting later on the interaction, it became clear that even though I shared similar race, ethnicity, and class backgrounds with this community, I was still seen as an outsider. The community members in this city had significant experience with academics and were protective of their community, as they should be. I later realized that being called out could be a sign that a community was experiencing research fatigue and that they had become more selective about who they allowed access to. Davalos (1993) explains that despite similarities in culture or identities, researchers do not have unlimited access to certain communities as “ethnic insiders,” because communities still distinguish between “us and them.” I overcame the community’s initial skepticism by being vulnerable and opening up, sharing my background and research interests, and being willing to take the time to listen carefully and learn about the challenges facing their community. After that, I gradually gained the community’s trust by showing up consistently and maintaining an open and honest relationship with the group. This included being transparent about my responsibilities, the institutional requirements for my dissertation and graduation, and my personal commitments as a husband and father.

6. Co-Creating Research Questions and Design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) involves community partners working closely with academic researchers throughout every stage of the research process, including brainstorming, developing research questions, data collection, analysis, and sharing findings (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). However, more often, a process occurs where “subjects are consulted, invited to review drafts, and asked to comment but are not necessarily engaged in every decision” (Pulido, 2008). I chose this approach for my dissertation because, although engaging a community at every step of designing and conducting research may seem ideal on paper, it can place a significant burden on community partners, who often have numerous organizational responsibilities and personal commitments to manage (Janes, 2016; Mora, 2017; Yoshihama & Carr, 2002). Once again, ongoing open and transparent communication between academics and community partners is essential for building effective university-community partnerships. This should be part of regular meetings, where time and space are allocated for discussing the research project.

Initially, as a researcher, your primary task is to learn as much as possible about the community partner and immerse yourself in the community to understand the challenges they face from their viewpoint. If it's not possible to hold regular meetings and interactions with community members to hear their stories and perspectives, an open or qualitative survey can be an effective way to gather input systematically from the community, or even informal interviews with key stakeholders.

While I provide these formal tools, as a researcher, it is also valuable to casually drive or bike around the community being studied, eat at local restaurants, attend social events, and conduct informal walking audits to gain a better understanding of the physical and social environment. However, for more in-depth exploration, I am offering a toolkit with guides that can help support the early stages of a new research partnership.

Below, I have provided a toolkit for participatory research design methods. The order of the tools will vary in different university-community partnership contexts, and you may not need to utilize all the tools—use at your discretion.

Toolkit:

C. POP model

- A tool to define partnerships, research goals, roles, expectations, and collaborative agenda setting
- [Link to guide](#) (Gass, 2013)

D. MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) fillable template

- Create formal agreements outlining expectations, roles, and agreements collaboratively
- A living document that can be amended if needed
- [Link to guide](#) (Department of Justice, 2025)

E. Community-asset Mapping

- A tool to map out a community's assets according to community members
 - This tool helps researchers understand what the community values and wants to build on
 - Note: It is important to include yourself as a researcher in this process to help establish your research goals, interests, and skill sets to find a match with community needs
 - [Link to guide](#) (Office for Coastal Management, 2018)
-

Part III: Doing the Work Together

7. Methods for Collaborative Data Collection

The shift toward community-engaged research demands methodological approaches that move beyond traditional extractive data collection toward collaborative processes that center community knowledge, lived experiences, and participatory decision-making. Collaborative data collection methods represent a fundamental reimagining of the research process, positioning community members as co-researchers rather than subjects, and recognizing that communities possess sophisticated knowledge systems that are essential for understanding complex phenomena.

As an urban planning scholar, participatory mapping represents one of the most powerful collaborative methods for understanding how communities experience and navigate urban spaces. This approach recognizes that residents possess intimate knowledge of neighborhood assets, challenges, and spatial relationships that may be invisible to external researchers or planning professionals. Community members gain an understanding of traffic patterns, informal social spaces, environmental hazards, and cultural landscapes through their daily lived experiences, creating rich spatial knowledge that can inform more responsive planning interventions.

Storytelling and oral histories provide essential methods for capturing the temporal and experiential dimensions of community knowledge that quantitative data cannot adequately

represent. These approaches recognize that communities understand neighborhood change and dynamics, and community development impacts through personal and collective narratives that convey not just what happened, but what events meant to residents and how they shaped community identity and resilience.

Photovoice methodology empowers community members to document their neighborhoods and experiences through photography, creating visual narratives that effectively communicate community perspectives to policymakers and other stakeholders. This approach recognizes that visual documentation can capture aspects of community life that are difficult to convey through surveys or interviews, while providing community members with tools to advocate for their priorities and concerns.

Community-led survey methods are a vital adaptation of traditional survey research that preserves community control over question development, data collection, and interpretation. Unlike standard surveys carried out by outsiders, community-led approaches involve residents in identifying key issues, designing culturally relevant questions, and choosing effective ways to reach community members who might be overlooked by traditional methods. These methods often show that communities understand important issues differently from what academic researchers or policymakers might assume.

For urban planners, youth-led methodologies acknowledge that young people hold unique perspectives on their communities, and they often face planning decisions that will impact them for decades. These methods position youth as researchers and community advocates, while also strengthening their ability to participate in planning processes that shape their neighborhoods and futures. Youth-led approaches can be particularly effective in understanding how young people move through urban spaces, experience environmental conditions, and envision future possibilities.

Below is a toolkit to help you navigate your collaborative research project:

F. Participatory mapping

- Participatory mapping is a method in which community members collaboratively create maps to document their knowledge, priorities, and experiences of a place. It can identify local assets, challenges, and risks; support planning, advocacy, and decision-making; and combine lived experience with spatial data. It's often used in urban planning, disaster preparedness, environmental justice, and land rights campaigns.
- [Link to guide](#) (Ralls and Pottinger, 2021)

G. Storytelling, oral histories, *testimonios*

- Testimonios Research Guide (Appendix G-1)
- Indigenous Storytelling Research Guide (Appendix G-2)

H. Photovoice

- A tool to collect data collaboratively by utilizing pictures and videos taken by community members
- [Link to guide](#) (Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2019)

I. Community-led Survey

- A tool to collect input and identify community challenges from community members

- This specific guide uses the term “project” and poses questions to community members regarding how the *project* is affecting their community. You may need to update this language to fit your study.
 - [Link to guide](#) (International Accountability Project, 2018)
- J. Youth-led methodologies
- Youth-led research methods are vital for ensuring that young people’s perspectives, experiences, and priorities are genuinely represented in knowledge creation and decision-making. By placing youth at the core of research design, data collection, and analysis, these methods challenge traditional power structures and promote more inclusive, fair, and relevant outcomes. Youth-led research not only empowers young people as catalysts for change in their communities but also boosts the credibility and effectiveness of research by grounding it in real-life experiences. Additionally, these methods help build youth skills, confidence, and leadership, allowing them to advocate for their rights and shape policies that impact their lives. In a time when intergenerational cooperation and participatory approaches are increasingly appreciated, youth-led research serves as a transformative strategy that connects knowledge, action, and social justice.
 - [Link to guide](#) (Girls Not Brides, 2024)

8. Deliverables and Community Accountability

Transformative community-based research requires fundamental accountability to the communities whose knowledge and experiences generate academic insights. Creating deliverables accessible to all community members, regardless of literacy levels, language backgrounds, or technical expertise, serves both as an ethical obligation and a methodological necessity for research that genuinely aligns with community priorities. Accountability mechanisms must ensure that research findings are shared with communities in formats that support their advocacy, organizing, and decision-making efforts. This includes translating complex data into visual narratives, policy briefs, community presentations, and digital tools that residents can independently use. When research deliverables remain confined to academic journals or technical reports, they reinforce knowledge inequities and weaken the participatory principles that define authentic community engagement, ultimately limiting the potential for research to address structural inequalities.

Here’s your community deliverables toolkit:

- Policy memos
 - Policy memos represent essential deliverables that transform collaborative community-based research into accessible advocacy instruments, distilling complex findings into concise, actionable recommendations that community partners can effectively use to influence local decision-makers. Unlike academic publications that often remain inaccessible to community stakeholders, policy memos translate research insights into clear policy language that residents can

present to city councils, planning commissions, and elected officials. These documents serve as critical bridges between community knowledge and institutional power, ensuring that collaborative research directly supports community organizing efforts while providing evidence-based foundations for policy change. Well-crafted policy memos honor community contributions by centering resident priorities and recommendations, while leveraging academic credibility to amplify community voices in policy spaces where technical expertise carries institutional weight.

- [Link to guide 1](#) (The Writing Workshop, 2024)
 - [Link to guide 2](#) (University of Southern California Libraries, n.d.)
 - Story maps
 - ArcGIS Story Maps allow academic researchers and community partners to collaboratively create spatial narratives that blend quantitative data with lived experiences and place-based storytelling. The platform democratizes spatial analysis by enabling community members to share local knowledge through photos, videos, and stories, while academics provide expertise in data visualization and research methods. For urban planning scholarship, Story Maps produce research outputs that serve two primary goals: advancing academic understanding and providing communities with powerful tools for advocacy, policy change, and grant applications, thereby making advanced spatial analysis accessible to all users.
 - [Link to guide 1](#) (de la Cruz, 2019)
 - [Link guide 2](#) (Kean, 2021)
 - Zines
 - Zines are powerful deliverables that embody the grassroots spirit of community-based research, transforming collaborative findings into accessible, community-controlled publications that prioritize creative expression over academic conventions. Unlike traditional research outputs, zines honor diverse forms of knowledge through visual art, personal narratives, poetry, and community-generated content that reflects residents' authentic voices and cultural practices. These DIY publications serve multiple functions: documenting community knowledge, building collective identity, and creating shareable advocacy tools that can circulate through informal networks, community centers, and organizing spaces. Zines democratize both research dissemination and knowledge production by removing barriers of academic jargon, expensive publication costs, and institutional gatekeeping, ensuring that collaborative research findings remain owned and controlled by the communities whose expertise generated them while fostering ongoing dialogue and community engagement.
 - [Link to guide 1](#) (Library of Virginia, 2023)
 - [Link to guide 2](#) (Cornell University Library, n.d.)
 - [Link to guide 3](#) (California State University, Fullerton Library, n.d.)
 - Other possibilities for deliverables include art exhibits, documentaries, community presentations, websites, local reports, blogs, and podcasts
-

Part IV: After the Project

9. Sustaining Relationships

One of the most critical yet overlooked dimensions of community-based participatory research concerns what happens after formal research activities conclude. The transition from active collaboration to post-project relationships represents a crucial test of whether academic-community partnerships were genuinely reciprocal or merely sophisticated forms of knowledge extraction.

The challenge of post-project sustainability reflects structural tensions between academic reward systems and community partnership principles. While universities evaluate research success through publications and grants, communities measure value through ongoing support, capacity building, and sustained advocacy. This mismatch creates situations where researchers disappear once data collection ends, leaving communities without the support they once relied upon.

Effective relationship sustainability requires long-term partnership models extending beyond individual projects. This involves supporting community organizing, providing technical assistance for grants, offering research training, or advocating within academic institutions for policies that benefit community projects. Such sustained engagement demonstrates genuine commitment to community wellbeing rather than transactional relationships focused solely on academic outcomes.

True reciprocity in community-based research extends far beyond funded project periods, requiring researchers to maintain mutual exchange relationships even when institutional incentives disappear. When external funding concludes, the test of authentic partnership emerges: will academic researchers continue contributing their expertise, institutional access, and professional networks to support community priorities, or will relationships dissolve once formal obligations end? Sustained reciprocity might involve researchers using their academic platforms to amplify community voices, providing pro-bono technical assistance for community-led initiatives, connecting partners with new funding opportunities, or advocating within university systems for ongoing institutional support. This continued exchange recognizes that communities invested significant time, knowledge, and trust during collaborative research processes, contributions that deserve ongoing reciprocal support rather than abandonment once academic goals are achieved. Meaningful reciprocity after funding ends demonstrates whether researchers view communities as genuine partners worthy of sustained commitment or as temporary sources of data for career advancement.

10. Evaluation & Reflection

Post-project evaluation in community-based research goes beyond traditional academic metrics to assess whether collaborative partnerships achieved community-identified goals and boosted local capacity for ongoing advocacy, organizing, and desired outcomes. Meaningful evaluation involves structured reflection processes that include all partners in honest assessments of what

worked, what failed, and how future collaborations could better serve community priorities. This reflective practice helps ensure that lessons learned lead to improved partnership approaches while respecting the time and expertise community members contributed throughout the research process.

Intentional closing activities are essential parts of ethical, community-based research that honor the relationships and knowledge exchanges sustaining collaborative partnerships. These activities provide structured opportunities for all partners to reflect on shared experiences, celebrate successes, address challenges, and formally recognize community members' contributions to research outcomes. Effective closing processes might include community celebration events, retreats, collaborative evaluation sessions, or ceremonial activities that acknowledge the importance of partnerships while creating space for honest feedback about what worked and what could be improved. Such activities show respect for community members' time and expertise, while providing closure that honors the emotional and intellectual investments needed for genuine collaboration. Without intentional closing processes, research partnerships risk ending abruptly once formal goals are met and failing to honor commitments, which could damage relationships and undermine the trust necessary for future collaborations. They also miss opportunities to strengthen community capacity and celebrate collective achievements.

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Appendix

A. Researcher Positionality

Researcher Positionality Worksheet

Interrogating Privilege, Power, and Institutional Roles in Community-Engaged Research

Part 1: Social Identity & Positionality

Reflect on your identities and lived experiences. For each category, write how you identify and consider how this may position you in relation to the community you are engaging with.

Social Identity Category	How do you identify?	How might this shape your perspective and relationship with the community?
Race / Ethnicity		
Gender / Gender Expression		
Socioeconomic Class Background		
Language(s) & Communication		
Immigration / Citizenship Status		
Age / Generation		
Education Level		
Other (e.g., religion, ability, sexual orientation)		

Intersectionality: How do multiple aspects of your identity intersect to create unique privileges or challenges in your research context?

Part 2: Privilege & Power

List aspects of your identity, background, or role that grant you privilege (e.g., access to resources, credibility, mobility, authority, legitimacy).

What privileges do you bring to this research?

List areas where you might experience marginalization or be positioned as an 'outsider' in relation to the community.

What vulnerabilities or limitations do you bring to this research?

Harm Potential: How might your research inadvertently harm community members or reinforce existing inequalities?

Consent and Participation: How are you ensuring meaningful, ongoing consent rather than extractive participation?

Confidentiality: How do you balance research transparency with protecting vulnerable community members?

Community Oversight: What mechanisms exist for community members to provide feedback on your research approach and findings?

Part 3: Institutional Roles & Accountability

Reflect on how your role within an institution influences your work.

What resources, authority, or constraints does your institution provide?

How might the history of your institution's relationship with the community affect trust, expectations, or perceptions?

To whom are you accountable (e.g., funders, supervisors, University IRB, community members)?

How will you negotiate conflicts between institutional priorities and community needs?

Mentorship and Networks: Who have been your key mentors and professional influences? How do their positionalities shape your research approach?

Part 4: Power in Research Relationships

Consider how your positionality may affect the research process.

Stage of Research	How does your positionality influence this stage?	How can you mitigate harm and share power?
Setting the research agenda		
Accessing the community / building trust		
Data collection		
Data analysis & interpretation		
Dissemination of findings		

Part 5: Commitments Moving Forward

Regular Check-ins: How will you regularly revisit your positionality throughout the research process?

Feedback Loops: What systems will you create to receive honest feedback about your role and impact?

Adaptive Strategies: How will you adjust your approach based on evolving community needs and relationships?

Based on your reflections, what commitments will you make to:

- How are you giving back to the community beyond your research outputs?
- Foster trust and reciprocity?
- Acknowledge and navigate your power and privilege?
- How will you ensure the community benefits from your research?

1.

2.

3.

Critical self-reflection is not a one-time task but an ongoing practice. Return to these questions throughout your research journey.

B. Reflection Questions in Community-Based Research

PART 1: Questions to Ask Yourself Before Meeting with a Community Partner <i>Answer these questions as honestly as you can; any reply is okay! The goal is to be clear with yourself so you can communicate effectively with your research partner. Feel free to write as much or as little as is useful to you.</i>	
Step 1 <i>In the left-hand column, review the questions that you can answer for yourself to reflect on the purpose of your work and potential partnership for community-based research. Revise or add questions as you go.</i>	Step 2 <i>Consider a community partner that you know or may want to know. In the right-hand column below, <u>answer the questions in Step 1</u>. Only answer the questions that seem useful to you!</i>
1. When will I prepare for this meeting? How much time do I have? If it is limited, which of the questions below are most important to ask myself before we meet?	
2. Where am I in my research process? To what extent have I defined my questions, methods, and data sets? How much data have I collected? What are my plans going forward?	
3. What are my motivations for reaching out to this partner? Is it a shared mission or goal, a desire for research contacts or access, or particular kinds of information? How do I hope my research will benefit them?	
4. How do I envision my partner's role in this process? For example, do I see them involved with research design, data collection, or translation of the results for community benefit? How active a role do I hope they will take?	

5. How open am I to collaboration and compromise? How fixed or flexible are different parts of my research design (e.g. questions, methods, outcomes)? What am I open to changing, and what would I like to keep defined?	
6. What have I done to prepare? What do I know about this organization? Have I read their website and social media pages? What do I know about their mission, vision, and history? What are their current projects, programs, and campaigns? Who is on their staff and board, and what is their organizational structure? What current partnerships do they have? What can I learn about their board members and other partners? Are there any local events, meetings, or actions I can attend? Are there other ways I can connect with this partner before or instead of a one-on-one meeting? Have I read any annual reports, white papers, press releases, blogs, or other publications they have produced? Have they partnered with other researchers-- at my university or others-- before?	
7. What information about me will this partner want, either before or during our meeting? How much, and what, do I need to say about myself and my research? What is my “elevator pitch” or introduction email? Can I provide more information upon request (CV, project timeline, IRB information,	

research questions, etc.)? What will I say if I don't know the answer to a question?	
8. Are there opportunities to volunteer my time, skills, or connections? How willing or able am I to do this (e.g. research, grant writing, program or admin support, connecting partners with university resources or inviting them to speak, etc.)?	
9. What power dynamics might be at play? How do my and my partner's identities (including gender, race, and class), institutional roles (e.g. as a university researcher, a NGO worker, a policymaker, a <i>campesino</i>, a schoolteacher, <i>etc.</i>), and prior experiences (or lack thereof) shape how my partner and I relate to one another? What assumptions might my partner have about me? Do I have any unexamined assumptions about them?	
10. What practical or logistical constraints should I consider? How much time do I have, both in my current schedule and in my graduate program? How might this partnership affect my ability to meet the expectations of my advisor or program? How will I balance this with family and personal commitments?	
11. What would make this a successful meeting? As I'm leaving, what do I want to have accomplished? How open am I to this changing?	

Add additional reflection questions here:	
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PART 2: Questions to Guide Your First Meeting with a Community Partner

Some of the questions are meant for you to think about. You could ask some of the questions during the meeting.

Step 1 <i>In the left-hand column, review the questions that you can answer for yourself to reflect on the purpose of your work and potential partnership for community-based research. Revise or add questions as you go.</i>	Step 2 <i>To guide the first meeting with your community partner, in the right-hand column below, <u>answer the questions in Step 1</u>. Only answer the questions that seem useful to you!</i>
13. What is it I want the partner to know about me and my work? What do I want to know about them? <i>“When did you start working at XYZ? How did you get into this work?”</i> <i>“I read that your organization just rolled out this new program on X. Can you tell me more about how that came about?”</i> <i>“I’m B, and I’m studying N. What kind of information about me would you like to know?”</i>	

14. What kind of research and knowledge is important to this partner's work? <i>"What kind research has been done on Y topic? From your point of view, what kind of research would be useful that has not been done on this?"</i> <i>"What are some major policy/quality improvement/systems issues for program ABC?"</i> <i>"I read about your current policy campaign on LMN. What kinds of research/data/information would be useful in advocating for or implementing those changes?"</i> <i>"Looking three to five years ahead, what kinds of actions do you plan to take? What changes do you want to see in this field? What type of research/data/information/ research might help inform that?"</i>	
15. Is there an established relationship between the university and this community partner already? <i>"What has been your experience working with researchers at NAU/other universities? Other students? Does your organization have partnerships in place already?"</i>	

16. How can this partnership align our priorities and benefit everyone involved? <i>"What are some goals you have for your organization? How might research about JKL help reach those goals?"</i> <i>"What are some ways you (or the population you serve) might benefit from this work?"</i> <i>"You mentioned XYZ as issues or areas of future work. My work might help address this. I am interested in VXY."</i>	
17. What else can I learn during this meeting? <i>"Can you give me a tour of the office/ center/ lab?"</i> <i>"Who else do you think I should talk to?"</i> <i>"I notice Q event is coming up. Is that open to the public?"</i>	
Add additional reflection questions here:	

PART 3: Questions to Ask Yourself After the Meeting

Remember to follow up and follow through. Send an email thanking your potential partner for their time, and make sure you follow through on any tasks you said you would in a timely way.

Step 1 <i>In the left-hand column, review the questions that you can answer for yourself to reflect on the purpose of your work and potential partnership for community-based research. Revise or add questions as you go.</i>	Step 2 <i>After the first meeting with your community partner, in the right-hand column below, <u>answer the questions in Step 1</u>. Only answer the questions that seem useful to you!</i>
18. What did I say I would do? When will I do these things?	
19. What did I learn? What were the big takeaways?	
20. What was as I expected? What was I surprised by?	

21. What questions does this bring up for me? What do I need to know now? Who do I need to talk to next?	
Add additional reflection questions here:	

Bredow, V. L., McGuire, C., Cox, K., Oviatt, J., & Preciado, E. (2020, Winter). *Creating & answering questions to support reflection in community-based research* [Workshop handout]. Newkirk Center for Science & Society, University of California, Irvine.

G-1. Testimonios Research Guide

Testimonio Research Guide

What is Testimonio?

Testimonio is a narrative method rooted in Latin American and Chicana/Latina/Latine traditions that documents personal and collective stories of struggle, resilience, and resistance. Testimonio creates a platform for interlocutors by inviting individuals to “testify” (speak) on their experiences of navigating social systems. The transcript of the testimony is used as evidence to challenge and disrupt systems of oppression by allowing individuals to “[bear] witness and [inscribe] into history [their] lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure.” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). For example, the Latina Feminist Group used testimonio to move away from traditional academic approaches to build new theories and knowledges generated by the sharing of stories that consider the importance of listening to mind, body, and spirit or creating what Rendón (2009) calls *sentipensante* (feeling-thinking) knowledge. Scholars Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona (2012) note that testimonio bridges the personal, collective, mind, body, and spirit; therefore, testimonio provides alternative methods, pedagogies, and political practices that disrupt silences, affirm dignity, and foster solidarity. It can be performed in multiple formats, including written, oral, digital, or performative.

Why Use Testimonio?

- To amplify the voices of marginalized individuals and communities.
- Foster a space for individuals to share their stories dealing with social systems like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.
- To document and theorize experiences of oppression, survival, and resistance by collecting testimonies and sharing them to understand the complexity of power.
- To connect personal narratives to collective struggles and inspire social change.
- To create knowledge that integrates mind, body, and spirit—what Moraga called *theory in the flesh* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015).

Step-by-Step Process:

Understand the Purpose

- Frame testimonio as both personal and collective: a way to “bear witness” to realities often excluded from official narratives.
- Recognize that testimonio is not neutral; it is a political, ethical, and transformative practice.

Build Trust & Relationships

- Engage with the community before formal research begins.
- Practice humility and transparency, explaining goals, use, and benefits of the work.
- Position yourself as a listener, ally, and participant in solidarity, rather than a detached observer.

Develop a Testimonio Guide

- Create a release form and consider scheduling an information session with interviewees. This is a good way to build trust between the interviewer and interlocutor.
- Prepare open-ended, flexible prompts to support participants in telling their story in their own way.
 - Example from my dissertation interviews:
 - *What does the farm mean to you?*
 - *What does the farm mean to the community?*

- *Who is part of that community?*
- Include prompts that invite reflection on structural conditions, emotional experiences, acts of resistance, and visions for the future.
 - *What forms of injustice have you or other community members experienced?*
 - *How have these experiences shaped your life, body, and spirit?*
 - *How has the community responded?*
 - *What changes would you like to see in your community?*
 - *What gives you hope for the future?*

Create a Safe & Supportive Space

- Choose a setting that is private and comfortable.
- Consider group testimonios.
- Offer choices: oral, written, audio, video, or creative formats.
- Discuss confidentiality and informed consent, recognizing that sharing testimony can involve emotional risks.

Record & Document

- With permission, audio- or video-record the testimonio or take detailed notes.
- Privilege the participant's own words and meanings, being attentive to cultural and linguistic nuances when translating.
- Remember that testimony involves both spoken and unspoken elements: emotions, silences, and the body.

Validate & Collaborate

- Share the draft with the participant for review, correction, or expansion.
- Recognize the participant as a co-creator of knowledge.
- Engage in reflexivity about your position and influence.

Share Responsibly

- Return findings to participants and their communities.
- Use the testimonies to support collective action, advocacy, and healing.
- Always respect the limits and conditions set by the testimonialista.

Recommended readings:

Blackmer Reyes, K., & Curry Rodríguez, J. E. (2012). Testimonio: Origins, terms, and resources. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(3), 525-538.

García, M. T. (2016). *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience*. University of Arizona Press.

G-2. Indigenous Storytelling Research Guide

Indigenous Storytelling Research Guide

Indigenous storytelling is a relational, culturally rooted, and pedagogical method of knowledge creation and sharing. As Iseke (2013), Datta (2017), and Tuhiwai Smith (2021) explain, it sustains communities, validates Indigenous epistemologies, expresses collective and personal experiences, and nurtures spiritual, political, and ecological relationships.

Why Use Indigenous Storytelling? According to Iseke (2013), Datta (2017), and Tuhiwai Smith (2021)

- To center Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in research.
- To resist and decolonize Western-dominated methods and reclaim Indigenous knowledge systems.
- To nurture reciprocity, respect, and relationships.
- To empower communities to tell their own histories and futures.
- To honor the sacredness of stories and their role in sustaining culture and identity.

Step-by-Step Process

Prepare Yourself & Understand Your Role

- Reflect on who you are and your relationship to the community and land, situating yourself as a researcher (Datta, 2017).
 - Consider utilizing the Reflection Questions in Community-Based Research (Appendix B) tool.
- Acknowledge your responsibilities, biases, and positionality (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).
 - Consider utilizing the Researcher Positionality (Appendix A) tool.
- Approach the work with humility, openness, and deep respect.
- Learn the local protocols around storytelling; some stories are sacred and cannot be shared publicly (Iseke, 2013).

Build Relationships

- Spend time with the community, listen, and build trust before collecting stories (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).
- Work collaboratively with Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members (Datta, 2017).
- Recognize that the researcher is a participant in the relationship, not an objective outsider (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

Create a Safe & Sacred Space

- Choose an environment that is comfortable, culturally appropriate, and spiritually respectful.
- Honor ceremonial aspects if appropriate (e.g., smudging, prayers, gifting tobacco) (Iseke, 2013).
- Incorporate formats like talking circles or informal gatherings to ensure participation and reciprocity.

Facilitate Storytelling

- Encourage participants to tell stories in their own way, language, and style (Datta, 2017).
- Use open-ended prompts if needed (see sample below):
 - *In your own words, who are you and where do you come from?*
 - *What role did storytelling play in your upbringing?*
 - *What lessons do stories teach the younger generations?*
 - *How do stories help us remember and honor relatives and ancestors?*
- Record stories respectfully, ask permission to audio, video, or transcribe (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

- Allow stories to unfold without interruption; silence, emotions, and body language are part of the narrative (Iseke, 2013).

Types of Stories

- According to Iseke (2013), Datta (2017), and Tuhiwai Smith (2021):
 - Sacred Stories: Only told by those authorized to share them.
 - Mythical/Legend Stories: Teach moral and cultural lessons, often stable over time.
 - Personal Stories: Lived experiences, often pedagogical and evolving.

Honor & Validate the Stories

- Share transcripts or interpretations with participants for review and approval.
- Recognize that stories are not just data; they carry spiritual, cultural, and emotional meaning (Datta, 2017).
- Respect collective ownership and rights to knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).
 - Ensure Indigenous Data Sovereignty by following these practical steps (Williamson et al., 2023):
 - Provide educational opportunities to Indigenous groups to increase awareness of their inherent data rights and the mechanisms available to protect their data.
 - All universities, scientific, environmental, and research institutions, as well as settler governments and their agencies, formally endorse the [CARE Principles](#) for Indigenous data governance.
 - All partnerships between Indigenous groups and settler organizations or institutions in the various fields of research establish clear and explicit data agreements. MOUs are useful in this context.

Share & Act Responsibly

- Use the stories to benefit the community, not just for academic purposes (Iseke, 2013).
- Attribute properly and respect confidentiality or cultural restrictions on sharing.
- Return the knowledge to the community in meaningful ways, acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty over their knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).
- Provide Indigenous community partners with access to the data and outputs to build an archive and preserve traditional values.

Ethical Considerations: According to Iseke (2013), Datta (2017), and Tuhiwai Smith (2021)

- Respect the sacredness of stories and avoid commodifying them.
- Recognize the collective ownership of knowledge.
- Follow protocols and ensure stories are told and received in a culturally safe way.
- Avoid imposing Western interpretations or categories.
- Recognize that research involving Indigenous peoples must align with the principles of self-determination and decolonization.

Recommended readings

Archibald, J.-A. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. UBC Press.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.