

# Community of Practice Discussion Summary



Topic: Unruly Research

October's Community of Practice explored the topic of Unruly Research, with guest speaker Sophia Ilyniak, PhD Candidate at York University.

Below is a summary of what CoP participants shared in response to who holds power in research, the risks and challenges of reframing research and exposing power dynamics, and how power can be more evenly distributed in the context of community-based research.

## Who possesses power in your research?

### 1. Funders hold significant power in shaping research priorities

Research funding often influences the research direction. Researchers sometimes must use different language or angles in funding applications compared to what they would like to research. Beyond funding research, there is often a lack of follow-through and support the action on research findings.

### 4. Indigenous community groups hold power

It is common for outside researchers to come to the community with their own agenda. Many Indigenous communities have established protocols around research that will not allow research to take place without a deeper understanding of community needs and community consent.

### 2. Academia often holds more power than community

Academic institutions often have "ownership" of the research. Even in community-based research, university-educated researchers often hold more power than peer researchers. Peer researchers may not always have adequate resources and support.

### 5. Community groups also have power

Marginalized and vulnerable communities are studied relentlessly and as such have the potential to demand power over how they engage in the research process. Some community groups have strong advocates for their own community and are reclaiming power, but it happens less often than it should.

### 3. Pressures for funding and publishing within academic institutions:

Power imbalances exist in institutions where researchers are driven by the need to secure funding and publish, sometimes at the expense of the community.

### 6. There are powers that benefit from issues existing

There are always beneficiaries to the status quo in the various fields/subjects in which we study, who do not want to see change.

## What are the potential risks and challenges of reframing research and exposing power dynamics?

### 1. A lack of recognition or support for community-based research within academia

"Traditional" researchers may not fully value community-based research models or the validity of data collected by peer researchers. As community-based research takes longer, it is typically more difficult for researchers to get promotions or tenure.

### 2. A lack of recognition or support for community-based research by funders

Some funders lack an awareness of what community-based research is, the resources and time it requires and its' value. The interests of funders may influence the direction of research, so a change in research direction may potentially affect receiving or continued funding.

### 3. Job Security

Challenging power dynamics can put individual researchers or staff at risk of losing their job.

### 4. Risks to post-secondary institutions

Post-secondary institutions may not want to be seen as being overly political. Partnerships can allow community groups to do more advocacy work that would otherwise be too risky for institutions.

### 5. Researchers to reflect on their own power

Researchers themselves must consider their own power dynamics and how they interact with research participants. Academics are in a sense 'making a living' by engaging in research with communities.

## How can power be more evenly distributed in the context of community-based research?

**1. Engage in Community-Centred Research:** The community-based research approach involves processes that place power in the hands of community. It shifts the focus from simply doing research for research's sake, to how the research is done, what is done with the research results and who benefits by research.

**2. Empower and Support the Community:** To shift the power dynamics, it's essential to give power to the community itself, recognizing that people are experts in their own experiences. The community should be involved throughout the entire research process, including inclusion in authorship. Community partners should receive the training and support needed to engage and lead research. Community members should be paid for their time and expertise, the research should take place where the community is located, and the community should retain ownership of the data.

**3. Focusing on a Transformative Research:** Research itself is a source of power that can inform policy changes and impact the balance of power at a systems level. This contrasts with a continuous cycle of needs assessment and capacity building, that may not lead to meaningful, long-term changes.

**4. Building a more supportive funding ecosystem:** A more supportive funding ecosystem for community-based research would include allowing community to dictate research priorities, focusing on solutions versus demonstrating the problem, lengthening funding timelines, becoming more flexible with changing needs, and supporting action-orientation based on research findings.

**5. Establishing trusting relationships and integrating intersectionality early on:** Maintaining trust between academic partners and the community is crucial to shift power dynamics and avoid causing harm. The research should also integrate intersectionality early on and consider engaging partners who question dominant narratives.

**6. Building a Support Network:** To help mitigate personal risks, it's important for researchers to seek out faculties, departments and colleagues who already understand and believe in community-based research.

**7. Plan for Transitions in Leadership:** To allow for the long-term continuation of a project, it's important to ensure community leadership. There can be concerns about what happens when researchers leave a project, so ensuring the ongoing existence of community leadership is crucial.

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