

# Guide for Grassroots and Professional Researchers on Doing Community-Based Participatory Research on Women's Homelessness

## Considering Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-Based Participatory Research (also known as CBPR) is research done by, with, and for grassroots communities.\* Our other Guides describe CBPR and suggest questions that women with lived experience, and professional researchers, can ask when considering CBPR on women's homelessness.

A grassroots group might decide to do research in order to answer questions, support advocacy work, initiate action, build skills, create employment opportunities, and / or gain access to research funds. When deciding whether to work with professional researchers, there are advantages and disadvantages to consider.

### Possible advantages to doing CBPR with professional researchers:

- Professional researchers might have access to funds, resources, and networks that communities do not.
- Professional researchers have expertise in carrying out research.
- Professionals can be powerful allies who can open doors that would normally be closed to women facing homelessness.
- Policy makers and others might pay more attention to research if it is done with professionals.

### Possible disadvantages to doing CBPR with professional researchers:

- Institutions like universities might impose restrictions that make it difficult for professionals to share power and resources equitably with communities.
- Professional researchers may not have skills in doing equitable teamwork, advocacy, community development, and action with grassroots communities.
- Professionals might be more focused on research than action.
- When meeting with CBPR teams, policy makers and others might only listen to the professional members, and disregard the expertise of grassroots members.

This guide was produced by the Women, Homelessness, and Community-Based Participatory Research project. It is based on the experiences and recommendations of a group of women experiencing poverty and homelessness, who have been involved with community-based participatory research. Other guides, and the full project report, can be found at [www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=55138](http://www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=55138). This project was funded by Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and Homelessness Partnering Strategy of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.



Canadian Homelessness  
Research Network



Cities Centre  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



\* In this guide we use the terms "community members," "grassroots," "with lived experience," "first voice," and "facing homelessness" interchangeably to describe individuals and communities involved in CBPR.

## Finding professional researchers to partner or advise on CBPR projects

- Ask other grassroots groups who they have worked with and how it went.
- Check the websites of local universities and colleges. Programs in social work, planning, education and criminology may have professors specializing in the issue you want to research. Some institutions publish listings of their experts in specific areas.
- Some non-profit organizations—like social planning councils, health research centres, or large multiservice agencies—have researchers on staff.

## Doing grassroots research

Professional researchers are not the only people capable of doing research. Grassroots research can be planned and carried out by people with lived experience.

### Finding research funding:

- Read reports of other research projects – they usually say who funded the project.
- Ask non-profit organizations who funds them – sometimes these funders also fund research and action.
- Funders might have criteria that exclude grassroots groups (e.g. charitable status, affiliation with a university) – but it might be possible to partner with a researcher or organization who can act as “trustee” for the purposes of the funding application.

### Learning about how to do research:

- The Ontario Women’s Health Network worked with women facing homelessness to develop a research method called “Inclusion Research.” You can download their Inclusion Research Handbook and Guide to Focus Groups here: <http://www.owhn.on.ca/inclusionhandbook.htm> or call them at 1-877-860-4545 to get a printed copy.
- Our Common Ground is a guide to doing CBPR on women’s health issues. You can download it at [www.cwhn.ca/en/node/42004](http://www.cwhn.ca/en/node/42004) or call the Canadian Women’s Health Network at 1-888-818-9172 to get a printed copy.

## Sustaining CBPR partnerships

Whether grassroots groups work on their own or with professional researchers, CBPR requires relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration. Some ways of fostering successful CBPR projects include:

- Hold frequent, regular team meetings throughout the project, from the planning period right through to the action and follow-up stages.
- Make group guidelines for communicating with each other.
- Set clear agendas and maintain focus at meetings, while allowing time for dialogue.
- Share leadership roles (such as chairing meetings) among all team members.
- Discuss team members’ goals and expectations for the research, what their accountabilities and responsibilities are to their institutions and communities, and how the project can meet these.
- Train professional team members on working respectfully and effectively with grassroots, on grassroots research methods, and on how to recognize and draw upon the skills of all team members.
- Train grassroots team members on formal data gathering and analysis methods, presentation, writing, and speaking to the media and policy makers.
- Bring each step of the research to the whole team for consultation, even parts that professional researchers normally take on alone (such as ethical reviews).
- Include an action plan as a central part of the project and reserve some project funds for carrying it out.
- Ensure that grassroots team members can use research products for change