**Tips for Community-Based Participatory Research and IRB Approval**

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Community-based research (CBR) is a type of research that takes a partnership approach, involving academic researchers and community partners and stakeholders. The goal is to utilize academic research in such a way that it benefits the partners in research, the community members, as well as the academics with institutional support. Many researchers and academics have pointed out that, in the words of Nancy Shore, Elaine Drew, Ruta Brazauskas, and Sarena D. Seifer, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) frequently demonstrate a “lack of understanding of [CBR] and/or, more broadly, community engagement” (17). Because of this, often applications for CBR projects are rejected by IRBs. To assist those who seek IRB approval for CBR projects, SLS has put together a document with generalized tips for preparing your IRB application. Each of the generalized tips is keyed to a particular part of an [IRB application](https://researchintegrity.gatech.edu/forms/IRB/Example_Study_version_12_15.pdf).

1. Before beginning the project, work with SLS to arrange a meeting [with a contact at GT’s IRB](https://researchintegrity.gatech.edu/contact-us#irb) to discuss with them what does and does not require IRB for your particular project. This is also a good opportunity to contextualize your research within the principles of community-based research. You might also consider meeting at least occasionally throughout the application process with the contact at IRB you initially establish so as to get acquainted and talk more generally about CBR. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application.**
2. It might be a good idea to have the institutional support of a center on campus, such as SLS, who can vouch for your methods and your particular project. SLS will be happy to collaborate with you on and support your process. If you seek this support, it is a good idea to have it in place before beginning the IRB application process. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application.**
3. Consider reading Elizabeth Tryon and Randy Stoecker’s article “The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service-Learning.” This article speaks to the experience of CBR from the perspective of community organizations. By demonstrating you are aware of the potential pitfalls of CBR in your application, you may be able to create avenues to rebut potential objections. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application; also relevant to Section II, The Protocol: Research Design and Methodology and Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
4. In your application, speak to the principles of the Belmont Report: “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.” Many IRBs have adopted these principles and take them seriously, so speaking to them directly will signal to the IRB that you are well-versed in the ethics of research and intend to take them into consideration in your work. **This is relevant to Section I, General Information; Section II, The Protocol: Research Design and Methodology; and Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
5. IRBs are designed to protect individual research participants, rather than communities. Demonstrate you are aware of this, and explain/justify why CBR takes a community-oriented framework. **This is relevant to Section I, General Information; Section II, The Protocol: Research Design and Methodology; and Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
6. It is best to discuss research details with your community partner(s) before the study begins; provide documentation you have done so in your application. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application; also relevant to Section VI, Attach Documents.**
7. Take an action-oriented approach; anticipate objections and present solutions up front to any problems that the IRB might identify. Provide as much information up front as possible. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application; also relevant to Section II, The Protocol: Research Design and Methodology and Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
8. Write your application in such a way that your project meets the exemption or minimal risk review criteria. **This is relevant to Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
9. Keep your audience in mind: researchers who sits on your particular IRB. As best as possible, write your application with them in mind. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application, but is also relevant for all sections of the formal application.**
10. Prepare memos that lay out the history and practices of community-based participatory research. You can reinforce this information with in-person dialogue and emails with members of the IRB; loop your community partners into these communications if appropriate and necessary. The memos can also take the form of an explanatory cover letter to orientate IRBs to general CBR practices and situational mores. You can also use this opportunity to highlight and explain issues that may be confusing for members of the IRB. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application, but is also relevant to Section VI, Attach Documents.**
11. Provide complementary examples where work similar to yours has been successfully carried out with IRB approval. **This is relevant to Section II, The Protocol: Research Design and Methodology; Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies; and Section VI, Attach Documents.**
12. Consider hosting a workshop—or partnering with SLS to do so—for IRB members where you can better familiarize them with the norms and ethics of CBR. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application.**
13. Be clear that your community partners are partners *in* research, rather than subjects *of* research. Always frame them as colleagues and as people you are lending resources to so that they can carry out a project they were planning to do anyway. Upfront, frame it as a reciprocal relationship with mutual benefits. **This is relevant to Section I, General Information, and Section III, Subject Information, Consent, and Types of Studies.**
14. Be prepared for this to take a lot of time; be open to writing several revisions. **This is relevant for general preparation and outside of the formal application.**

**Further Reading**

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