ABSTRACT. An evaluation of community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects conducted through Engaging the City, between September 2008 and April 2013, was performed to examine the experience, perceptions, and value of these projects from the perspective of community partners. Past and present community partners were invited to participate in the evaluation. A survey was administered through in-person or telephone semi-structured interviews or online via SurveyMonkey. A sample of 18 community partners and 36 CBPR projects were reviewed. The method of data collection was dependent on the preferences of the individual community partner. Responses were thematically analyzed separately by two reviewers. These themes were then compared and consolidated. Results of the evaluation found that community partners were able to use the results of the CBPR project in a variety of ways including, but not limited to the: continuation of a project or program, modification of existing programs, development of new programs and partnerships, changes to strategic planning, an understanding of the research topic in further detail, an increase in funding, and an acknowledgement of possibilities for further research. To improve future partnerships, community partners expressed the need for further support surrounding communication and to identify other potential ways to use the results of the research. Nonetheless, all community partners were willing to collaborate on future CBPR projects should the opportunity arise, because they valued the mutually beneficial partnership and research process as it generated evidence-based support for their community work.
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END
FOREWORD

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is, by its very nature, a shared process. It is only when we come together to offer our diverse skill sets, perceptions and ideas that projects can truly flourish. The course we facilitate is grounded in this and other CBPR principles. It attempts to co-create spaces for student-researchers, community partners, members of academia and others to share and grow together. When we embarked on this Forward with Integrity research project, we wanted the development to follow the principles that ground the rest of our work. Inviting two former CBPR students into this project as researchers with us was the first step in helping us realize this goal. Lorraine and Jennifer have helped us to understand the intricacies of the work we have completed these past 5 years in ways that we, as those who are, so closely involved, simply could not foresee. Their unwavering dedication to the principles of CBPR have informed the entire research process – from the development of the program evaluation itself, to the construction of the evaluation tools, to the analysis of the data, and the dissemination of the results. Their work has not only created this report, which will inform the course’s evolution, but has become an illustrative example of the power of collective, co-created spaces for community engaged scholarship. Thank you Jennifer and Lorraine for your passion, commitment and tireless advocacy for this complex and dynamic way of working. We, along with our community partners, are grateful for all you have given and shared during these many months.

- Margaret Secord & Sarah Glen
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our research team would first and foremost like to thank all of our community partners for their dedication to their work. Specifically, we would like to thank them for their continued partnership, time, effort, expertise and support in our community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects. Without you, none of this would be possible. We would also like to express gratitude to Del Harnish, and the Bachelor of Health Sciences faculty and administrative staff for their support and assistance over the course of this evaluation and all of our CBPR projects. This Forward with Integrity grant has allowed us to unpack and appreciate the intricacies of CBPR through Engaging the City; and thus, we would like to thank Dr. Patrick Deane, Laura Harrington, and the Forward With Integrity Advisory Group for making this evaluation possible.

INTRODUCTION

3.1 Community-Based Participatory Research: An Overview

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is “a collaborative, partnership approach to research that equitably involves, for example, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process” (Israel, 1998). It is through this form of research methodology that community partners are able to act as co-researchers to contribute their expertise and share responsibilities and ownership of the research being conducted (Israel, 1998). Differing from other forms of research, the aims of CBPR are to generate and increase knowledge of a particular phenomenon and integrate that
understanding with interventions and policy to improve the quality of life of community members. Further, CBPR aims to be an iterative process that incorporates research, reflection and action throughout the duration of the project. The principles of CBPR are as follows:

1. Recognizes community as a unit of identity;
2. Builds on strengths and resources within the community;
3. Facilitates collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research;
4. Integrates knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners;
5. Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities;
6. Involves a cyclical and iterative process;
7. Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives;
8. Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners;
9. Involves a long-term commitment from all partners.

In conducting CBPR projects, communities and researchers actively participate in all aspects of the research project – from the development of the research topic and question, to data collection, through to dissemination of the results. With this form of research, it is imperative that equitable partnerships are formed between “formally trained” research partners and community partners that hold an expertise in the community and the topic being explored. A partnership in this type of research is considered to be equitable if all parties share power,
resources, credit, results and knowledge. Additionally, there should be a reciprocal appreciation of each other’s role and skills at each stage of the research process (Israel, 1998).

3.2 Engaging the City: Background

In 2008, after a variety of forms of discussion and dialogue between McMaster and Hamilton communities, the journey began to utilize the principles of CBPR for the betterment of the Hamilton community and McMaster students. A framework was developed that would support a way for students at McMaster to understand the community’s fabric beyond volunteering, service learning, and other community engagement initiatives. It was important that this initiative would not only encourage McMaster students to connect with community organizations in both theory and practice, but that such an approach build sustainable, purposeful, and mutually beneficial relationships with community organizations.

Offered through the Bachelor of Health Sciences Program, two courses called *HTH SCI 3DD3 Engaging the City* (3DD3) and *Community Collective Thesis* (CCT; designated as either *HTH SCI 4A09* or *4B06*) are collectively known as *Engaging the City*. 3DD3 is a four-month course designed for students to become aware of the Hamilton community beyond the ‘McMaster bubble’ and learn best practices of community engagement and CBPR. Through 3DD3, students also gain appreciation for Hamilton’s historical and current issues. Upon completion of this preparatory course, students who demonstrate an interest and ability to conduct research using a CBPR approach are given an opportunity to conduct a CBPR thesis or senior project (*HTH SCI 4A09* or *4B06*, respectively). To serve the needs of these projects, the academic facilitators of 3DD3 are also the academic supervisors for student-researchers in CCT. For the purposes of this
**Figure 1. Framework of Engaging the City’s CBPR Process**

(A) **3DD3.** 3DD3 serves as an academic course facilitated by both members of the McMaster and Hamilton community. It provides the foundations of community engagement and CBPR. It engages 3rd and 4th year McMaster students across the university and encourages them to reach beyond the ‘McMaster Bubble’ and build equitable and sustainable partnerships between McMaster and many of Hamilton’s diverse communities. The components and structure of the course changes yearly based on feedback from students, community partners and facilitators, but generally the course facilitates: power, privilege and oppression, complexities of the many histories of Hamilton and its communities, diverse neighbourhoods within Hamilton, ethics of community engagement and CBPR, economics and decision making in community engagement, policy dissemination, the value of lived experience and voices of experience from members of Hamilton’s marginalized communities. (B) **Making Connections.** Relationships and partnerships for CBPR projects are built through: (i) outreach from an academic supervisor; (ii) a student who was specifically interested in working with the organization based on their own passions, interests and community work; and/or (iii) through an existing community partners’ network(s). (C) **Forming the Partnership.** Two or three pre-meetings take place between the potential community partner and an academic supervisor to listen to the needs of the community partner, discuss past experiences of working with McMaster students in different contexts, clarify and communicate concerns and draft an outline of a potential project. (D) **Match Game.** Academic supervisors survey 3DD3 students to determine their research interests and abilities. Academic supervisors then match each student to a CBPR project that challenges the student in a way that will allow them to grow and meets the objectives and goals of the community partner. The first meeting between the community partner, student-researcher and academic supervisor then occurs to discuss learning contracts, allow all partners to ask questions, and begin building an equitable research partnership. (E) **Background Research.** Secondary background research is conducted by the student-researcher to better inform themselves of the research topic and the study design most appropriate for the project. It is important to note that this step continues throughout the rest of the CBPR project to ensure that project is supported in an evidence-based manner. (F) **Designing the Project.** Student-researchers work with their academic supervisor and their community partner to design the CBPR project. This includes recruitment materials, consent forms, interview guides, questionnaires and whatever else they may need to begin data collection. (G) **Ethics Review & Approval.** The student-researcher then takes the collaboratively designed research project and works with and consults a member of the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board to apply for ethics approval. (H) **Participant Recruitment.** Student-researchers work with their community partner to appropriately recruit participants from their target population for the CBPR research project. (I) **Data Collection.** Student-researchers work to collect data in a variety of ways. While students primarily collect data independently, communication with and input from the community partner is imperative to ensure that the community partner’s target population is included. (J) **Analysis.** Data is analyzed by the student-researcher with guidance and input from the academic supervisor to ensure that important themes are extracted using a variety of appropriate and sound methods of data analysis. (K) **Write-Up.** A final research report is written by the student-researcher to meet the academic requirements of their thesis or senior research project course and for use by the community partner. An executive summary is also included which has been identified as an important dissemination piece by the community partner. (L) **Dissemination.** Results of the CBPR project are discussed between the community partner, the academic supervisor and the student-researcher. The best methods of dissemination to the community are determined and executed.
report, the terms academic facilitator and academic supervisor are used to mark their specific role at a particular stage of Engaging the City’s CBPR process (Figure 1). For example, the term academic supervisor would be used when referring to the stages outlined in Figure 1, phase B to L.

CCT is approximately a 12-month process which allows student-researchers the opportunity to further their passion and continue to develop and apply their skill and expertise in community engagement and CBPR in the Hamilton community. This opportunity comes to students after academic supervisors and community partners have made a connection (Figure 1, phase B), and have formed a partnership through pre-meetings where the initial research question(s) and the scale and scope of the research project is discussed (Figure 1, phases B to C). After careful consideration of the community partner’s needs and the student’s interest and skills, a student or team of students is matched to the CBPR project. (Figure 1, phase D). Furthermore, in recognition of the fact that different community partners can lend different expertise to a CBPR project, a student or team of students can work with one community partner or a team of community partners. This typically occurs among community partners who have mutual interests and/or support a population with common or similar needs. Community partners value other community organizations’ expertise and the collaboration of resources to conduct a CBPR project. The number of students or number of community partners assigned to a project is dependent on its scope and the wishes of the community partner.

If the project requires more than one student-researcher to support the project’s needs, each student is assigned an element of the project and conducts research for that component (Figure 2, box C and D for examples). Further, a project’s scope may be too large and may not be possible to complete within one year. In this case, the community partner and academic
supervisor may make the decision to sub-divide the project into multiple phases with each phase being completed by a student or team of students in succeeding years until the project’s completion (Figure 2, box F for an illustration). The amount of time and capacity a community partner has to supervise one or multiple student-researchers in a given CCT year may also determine how a larger project is divided.

The matching process and project development can vary depending on the goals and objectives of a community partner and their CBPR project. Nonetheless, regardless of whether a student-researcher is matched to: (a) a project with a smaller scope; (b) a subcomponent of a larger project; (c) a phase of a project; (d) a project with multiple community partners; or (e) a combination of the above, students are matched to a project that will challenge them and meets the needs of their community partner(s).

Following the matching process, student-researchers begin to conduct secondary background research on the project to better acquaint themselves with the topic and unique needs of the relevant population (Figure 1, phase E). This background research serves to not only inform the student but also the project design. Following this research (and perhaps concurrently), the student-researcher and the community partner, with support from the academic supervisor, work to develop a learning contract which outlines the expectations and direction for the project, design of the project, and an approximate timeline for the project (Figure 1, phase F). Using this information, the student then applies for ethics approval, a process that is expedited for CBPR students through direct consultation with Kristina Trim, a Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) member (Figure 1, phase G). This process is expedited because the academic supervisors heard anecdotally from community partners that the typical
HiREB approval process was too lengthy and could at times impact the student’s ability to complete all the project’s research objectives. Nonetheless, the ethics approval process is an imperative component of any research project as it serves to ensure that any work being done minimizes harm to the participating population and strengthens the research project through suggestions on how to improve design and data collection methodologies.

Following HiREB approval, the community partner and student-researcher begin to work on participant recruitment (Figure 1, phase H) and data collection (Figure 1, phase I). The student then typically takes all data collected and, using a variety of research methodologies, analyzes the data (Figure 1, phase J) and shares and disseminates the results with the community partner through a written report (Figure 1, phase K) and other dissemination methods identified as valuable to the community partner (Figure 1, phase L). Alternative dissemination methods can include conference presentations, funding applications, arts-based methods and many more. Together, 3DD3 and CCT form this dynamic 18-month CBPR educational process known as *Engaging the City*.

Given the collaborative nature of *Engaging the City* and the CBPR process, it is important to recognize the multiple perspectives that have contributed to, formed and informed this *FWI* report. Thus, to ensure a holistic understanding of *Engaging the City*, this report includes the perspective of: (a) the community partner; (b) the *Engaging the City* academic facilitator and supervisor; (c) the student-researcher and (d) the authors as former CBPR student-researchers. Certain perspectives have been highlighted within this report when they are of particular importance for one component of the *Engaging the City* process.
The multiple perspectives involved in one partnership and project can be noted through the aforementioned variance in the size, scope and number of students of each CBPR project. If a project’s scope is large enough to have multiple subcomponents, each subcomponent is considered to be an individual project from the perspective of the student-researcher and academic supervisor. From this academic perspective, each student is evaluated academically on an individual basis with each subcomponent being a project in and of itself, as can be seen in

Figure 2. Illustrating Multiple Perspectives in CBPR Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Projects from an Academic Perspective</th>
<th>Number of Projects from a Community Partner’s Perspective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="One project" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="One project" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Four separate projects" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="One project" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Two separate projects" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="One project" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A-B) In its simplest form, a CBPR project can consist of one student-researcher partnering with a community partner for a project with a scope that the student alone can manage. This is counted as a single project from both an academic and a community partner perspective. (C-D) If the needs of the community partner warrant a project with a large scope, a team of student-researchers can work with a community partner. Each student completes a subcomponent of the larger project. From an academic perspective, each subcomponent is considered one project because each student is evaluated individually for the academic institution. From a community partner perspective, a single collective project is being completed. (E-F) If a community partner would like to complete a research project with even a larger scope, the project can span a number of years, with one student completing a manageable phase of the project each year. The decision to divide projects into phases rather than sub-components depends on whether the part of the project can be completed simultaneously or must be completed in succession; furthermore, the amount of time a CP has to devote to co-supervising students each year is also a factor. Both the academic institution and the community partner view this case as two separate projects that build off of each other. This is because the projects are completed in different years.
Figure 2, box C. However, from the perspective of the community partner, each subcomponent of the CBPR project is amalgamated and is viewed as a single collective project (Figure 2, box D) with overarching knowledge, themes, and recommendations based on the subcomponents conducted.

As outlined above, Engaging the City is truly a unique and ever-evolving process that continues to place the principles of CBPR and the needs of its community partners first. Since 3DD3 and CCT began five years ago, the course has continued to develop with an expanding number of community partners and student-researchers. Margaret Secord and Sarah Glen serve as co-facilitators of 3DD3 and supervisors of CCT, and as such are closely connected all aspects of the CBPR process. There are a number of others who have helped nurture 3DD3 to where it is today, including: Mike DesJardins, Cole Gately, Matt Thompson, Kristina Trim, Paul Uy and Jennie Vengris.

### 3.3 Forward with Integrity

In September 2011, McMaster University’s President Dr. Patrick Deane wrote an open letter entitled Forward with Integrity (FWI), which describes the direction he hopes the university will move toward. He believes that, as an academic community, McMaster has an obligation to contribute to the greater good of the local community, city, and world at large (Deane, 2011). To execute this vision, the Forward with Integrity Advisory Group developed the approach of ‘educating for capability’. This approach moves beyond the traditional training and education focused on knowledge and skill development. Rather, educating for capability emphasizes continual growth, the ability to adapt, improve performance and generate new knowledge (FWI
Advisory Group, 2012). This approach, in tandem with the challenge posed by Dr. Deane ‘to develop and sustain mutually beneficial connections and partnerships with local and global communities’ (FWI Advisory Group, 2012), are reflected in the principles of CBPR and the framework of Engaging the City.

Due to the alignment of beliefs and interests, the FWI initiative and grant provided the opportunity for Engaging the City to critically examine campus-community partnerships within 3DD3 and CCT. This research has furthered an environment that educates for capability within the students supported by Engaging the City, its community partners, and with the growth of inter-faculty relationships that it fosters. This grant has enabled the examination of anecdotal evidence through an evidence-based approach to further guide us in the continual evolution of CBPR within the McMaster and Hamilton communities.

### 3.4 Objectives

This program evaluation aims to gather and synthesize the feedback, perspectives and perceptions of community partners on the process, outcomes and value of CBPR projects and partnerships. It is hoped that this will provide further insight into how CBPR partnerships could evolve and better suit the needs of the community partner, and allow for reflection and critical evaluation of the evolution of CBPR projects over the past five years. Finally, this evaluation will examine the contribution that Engaging the City CBPR projects may or may not have made throughout McMaster and Hamilton communities.
4.1 Participants

Community partners of *Engaging the City* who have completed a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project between September 2008 and April 2013, were contacted to participate in this evaluation. These community partners are primarily located in Hamilton and some community partners border the Burlington area. Community partners offer a range of services for a variety of populations in the Hamilton community. *Engaging the City* has partnered with 27 community partners in this timeframe and has completed 52 CBPR projects with 53 student-researchers. *Engaging the City* continues to support CBPR projects, with the number of students and projects steadily increasing each year. In fact, the current 2013-2014 academic year has the largest cohort of students to date, and as of April 2014, *Engaging the City* will have established 66 CBPR projects with 45 community partners and 71 students.

Of the 27 community partners *Engaging the City* has partnered with, 24 could be contacted for this program evaluation. 18 community partners agreed to participate; as such, 36 projects and 36 students were reviewed. However, from community partner’s perspective and for the purposes of this report, 29 projects were reviewed with 36 students (i.e. seven projects from the total 36 projects stated above were part of larger projects; refer to Figure 2 for further

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Summary of CBPR Projects</th>
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<tr>
<td>As of April 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 community partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 CBPR projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 student-researchers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The quantity of CBPR projects are from the academic perspective. Given that this report was created through an FWI initiative, the academic perspective was chosen for analysis. Please see Figure 2 for a full description on the difference between academic and community partner perspectives.
explanation). If the community partner had completed more than one CBPR project with *Engaging the City*, they were asked to comment on each project separately. If one project had multiple community partners, they were interviewed as a collective.

The community partner representative chosen to participate in the interview, was, when possible, the academic supervisor’s and the student-researcher’s primary contact for the project. However, some community partners had primary contacts who had retired, moved to different positions, left the organization and/or could not be reached due to a change in contact information. In such cases, community partner representatives who were aware of the project, but not directly involved, spoke on behalf of the primary contact.

In order to participate and confidently offer responses for this evaluation, the representatives interviewed on behalf of the community organization had to (a) have completed a CBPR project between September 2008 and April 2013; (b) be directly involved with the CBPR project, or be sufficiently knowledgeable about the project in order to provide accurate responses, and (c) recall enough about the CBPR project and the respective student-researcher(s), especially if significant time had passed.

### 4.2 Measures

A 16-item questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered to community partner representatives who participated in this evaluation. Community partners were asked to respond to a variety of topics, including: (a) a brief description of the CBPR project completed; (b) their experience working with a student-researcher or team of student-researchers; (c) how the results of the CBPR project were used by the organization and the impact of results; and (d) if
they would consider partnering with *Engaging the City* for future research projects. Questionnaire items were asked via an open-ended question, a 7-point Likert scale, or a series of check-boxes.

**4.3 Procedure**

An invitation was extended to community partners via email or telephone to participate in completing an evaluative questionnaire (Appendix B). Community partners were advised that they could choose to abstain from answering any of the questionnaire items or withdraw from participating at any time. They were also informed that their decision to participate or abstain in the evaluation would not affect their relationship with the academic supervisors or student-researchers and would not harm future or potential CBPR projects.

In order to be respectful of the time community partners were willing to give to complete the evaluation, three different methods of gathering feedback were presented as options: (1) participating in a semi-structured interview in-person with a research assistant; (2) participating in a semi-structured interview over the telephone with a research assistant; or (3) completing the questionnaire online via SurveyMonkey. Community partners selected the option most convenient for them.

In-person semi-structured interviews were conducted at the location of the community partner’s office or another location of their choice. Responses to the interviews conducted in-person or over the telephone were audio recorded and a summary of the responses was entered into SurveyMonkey. Two research assistants facilitated the recruitment and data collection procedures.
4.4 Analysis

Themes from the data were extracted via thematic analysis techniques, independently, by two research assistants. The themes extracted by both research assistants were then compared and consolidated.

4.5 Dissemination

In addition to a formal report, the results of the program evaluation were also shared with community partners and a range of other stakeholders from the McMaster and Hamilton communities at a dissemination event held on November 27, 2013 (Refer to Appendix C for the invitation). A presentation given by the academic facilitators and two research assistants described the purpose of this program evaluation, principles of CBPR, general feedback of community partners, and recommended actions to improve future partnerships in response to the community partner feedback. All community partners who participated in the program evaluation, as well as members of the FWI staff, were provided with an executive summary of the results (Appendix D).

RESULTS

Key themes identified through semi-structured interviews and surveys regarding a community partner’s experience working on a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project were found to be subdivided into four main project components: the formation of the
partnership, the project’s process, the outcomes upon completion of the project, and the project in its entirety.

5.1 Forming the Partnership

Community partners were found to become connected to a CBPR project through either a McMaster student-researcher or networks built through community work. If connected through a McMaster student, this partnership occurred due to the student’s previous connection or work with a community organization (e.g. volunteering). CBPR projects initiated through community networks, lead to contact with an academic supervisor or to another community organization which had a pre-existing connection with an academic supervisor.

Prior to a project’s initiation, the community partner’s perceptions of the forthcoming CBPR project was primarily based on either their initial interactions with an academic supervisor and/or their own personal hesitations of working with a student-researcher and the McMaster institution. Nonetheless, the majority, 59% (17 out 29), of community partners did not have any hesitations when initially partnering with McMaster’s Engaging the City for a CBPR project. However, 41% (12 out of 29) of community partners did have initial hesitations when partnering with McMaster on this type of project. When a community partner did experience hesitations prior to the project’s initiation, it was due to perceived expectations of the administrative components of working with the university (e.g. formal documents such as work placement and ethics forms), working with a student-researcher (e.g. level of commitment, limitations of students’ schedules, etc.), and/or the time commitment required on behalf of the community partner.
If the community partner experienced hesitation towards partnering with McMaster as an academic institution, this apprehension stemmed primarily from the concern regarding the lengthy ethics process required by the university and/or the cost that may be associated with formally doing research with an academic institution.

When hesitations or apprehensions were regarding the experience of working with a student-researcher, it was primarily due to the community partner’s perception that with student projects, the student’s needs come before their organization’s and/or the student may be lacking commitment, interest, capabilities or ability to maintain confidentiality during the project. Hesitations regarding the demands on the community partner’s time stemmed from concerns of their staff’s ability to work with or direct the student, as well as the time required to train staff to work with the student.

Finally, it is important to note that some of these hesitations were either based upon previous experiences working with an academic institution and/or students prior to their experience with CBPR. Alternatively, this hesitation was also found to be a result of the community partner’s lack of experience working with students and an academic institution and, thus, an apprehension towards the unknown of such an experience. In summary, it is important to recognize that both the influence of pre-existing negative experiences and fear of partnering with the university played an integral role in the initial formation of a CBPR partnership.

5.2 The Process

The community partner’s experience during the project was examined through their level of trust with the student-researcher, expectations being met by the student, the student’s
preparation, communication and professionalism. It is important to note that for the evaluation of the process, 29 projects were reviewed but for some items on the questionnaire some community partners abstained which accounts for any variance in the number of respondents per question.

5.2.1 Level of Trust

When describing their level of trust with a student-researcher, it was found that community partners generally had established a high level of trust. Often times their level of trust in the student developed over the course of the project. In some cases, however, there was a decrease in trust due to issues that arose with the student’s work, communication or other factors that hindered the project’s progression or completion. When asked to rate their level of trust with the student, 85.2% of community partners indicated a moderate to high level of overall trust, rating a 7 (18 out of 27 respondents) or 6 (5 out of 27 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale. Further, 11.1% of community partners (3 out of 27 respondents) felt that they had an adequate level of trust with their student through a rating of a 5 on a 7-point Likert scale. Finally, 3.7% (1 out of 27 respondents) of community partners indicated a low level of trust rating a 1 on a 7-point Likert scale.

5.2.2 Meeting Expectations

Community partners reported that their expectations were exceeded in the vast majority (66.7%) of CBPR projects rating a 7 (14 out of 27 respondents) or 6 (4 out of 27 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale. Nonetheless, some community partners experienced that the student-
researchers or the projects did not meet their expectations throughout, with 22.2% of respondents reporting a 4 (4 out of 27 respondents) or 3 (2 out of 27 respondents) on the same 7-point Likert scale. However, when dissatisfaction was noted in their responses, community partners frequently expressed that when expectations were not met, it was primarily due to a misalignment between the expectations of the community partner, student and/or academic supervisor collaborating on the project. Finally, one community partner noted that they did not have any expectations outlined to comment on whether their expectations were met throughout the process.

5.2.3 Student Preparation

When discussing the student-researcher’s preparation for a CBPR project, the majority of community partners indicated that students were highly prepared to conduct research in the community with 76% rating a 7 (13 out of 25 respondents) or 6 (6 out of 25 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale. 20% (5 out of 25 respondents) of community partners qualitatively indicated that the student working on their CBPR project was not adequately prepared. Preparation was acknowledged by community partners to be partially gained through experience and that in the majority of CBPR projects, a learning curve for both the community partner and student was present. This learning curve included adapting to working together and understanding the terminology used by all three parties. Additionally, community partners responded with the view that there were two components of student preparedness that factored into their ratings. The first was the core set of skills and knowledge that the student should be equipped with prior to
engaging in a project with the community, and the second was the student’s willingness and 
ability to adapt, develop and refine skills as the project progressed.

5.2.4 Communication

Perhaps one of the most frequently discussed aspects of the community partner’s 
experience was communication. It was also one of the most variable factors among a community 
partner’s experience with a student-researcher and a CBPR project. Qualitative data reveals 
generally that communication between the community partner and the student would range 
from regular, effective communication to intermittent communication on behalf of the student 
or community partner (Figure 3). Additionally, it was also experienced by some community 
partners that these four forms of communication could all be present and fluctuate during the 
project.

Figure 3. Differing Forms of Communication between Community Partner and Student-Researcher

5.2.5 Professionalism

When commenting on their experience with a student-researcher’s professionalism (i.e. 
work-ethic, punctuality, and the ability to seek help and support when necessary) over the course 
of a CBPR project, generally it was found that the majority of community partners worked with a 
student-researcher possessing a high degree of professionalism with 76.9% of responding
community partners rating a 7 (15 out of 26 respondents) or 6 (5 out of 26 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale. Nonetheless, some community partners did note that this could be an area of improvement with 22.9% of community partners rating their student’s level of professionalism as a 5 (3 out of 26 respondents), 4 (1 out of 26 respondents), 3 (1 out of 26 respondents), or 1 (1 out of 26 respondents).

5.2.6 Overall Experience with Student-Researcher

Generally, community partners felt that their experience working with student-researchers on a CBPR project was positive and mutually beneficial as 81.5% of community partners rated their experience a 7 (16 out of 27 respondents) or 6 (6 out of 27 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale. Nonetheless, some community partners felt that their overall experience could be improved having rated a 5 (2 out of 27 respondents), 4 (1 out of 27 respondents), or 3 (2 out of 27 respondents). Qualitatively, a less than exemplary overall experience was generally due to: the student not upholding responsibilities, being transparent during the project, or unexpected delays in the project’s process. Overall, community partners indicated that the students were dedicated, approachable, and open to both feedback and direction from the community partner and academic supervisor.

5.3 The Outcomes

According to community partners, their experience following the completion of a CBPR project was mainly influenced by the results, their use and impact within a particular community or communities. As illustrated through Figure 4, community partners indicated that they were
able to use the results of their CBPR projects in a plethora of ways both internally within their organization and externally for their community as a whole. Specifically, 73.1% of community partners overwhelmingly stated that they were able to better understand a research topic of importance. Further, 50% of all community partners interviewed stated that they were able to modify and improve existing programs based on their CBPR project.

Nonetheless, despite the abundant utilization of the results, community partners did not always feel that the impact of the results reached its full potential. While 50% of community partners rated the impact of the CBPR project to be exemplary with a 7 (11 out of 26 respondents) or 6 (2 out of 26 respondents) on a 7-point Likert scale, 30.7% of community partners rated the impact of the CBPR project on their community to be adequate with a 5 (5 out of 26 respondents) or 4 (2 out of 26 respondents) and 3.8% (1 out of 26 respondents) stated that the CBPR project had a poor impact, rating a 1 on a 7-point Likert scale. In summary, when asked about the impact that CBPR projects and their results had, community partners reported a wide range of responses from having an impact to little or no impact. Further, some community partners reported that the results could not be used for their original, intended purpose. It can also be noted that 17.9%

![Figure 4. Community use of Results from Engaging the City CBPR Projects. Illustration of the numerous ways that community partners have been able to use the results of CBPR projects over the past five years. Community partners expressed that they were able to utilize the results of these projects in one or more of the listed means.](image-url)
(5 out of 28 respondents) of community partners indicated that the impact of the results was yet to be seen and thus, could not respond to this question appropriately.

5.4 The Overall Experience

When asked to compare the experience of conducting a CBPR project with the experience of working with other McMaster students on placement (e.g. nursing or social work placement students), 81.0% (17 of 21 respondents) of community partners reported that CBPR student-researchers were more self-directed. 71.4% (15 of 21 respondents) of community partners reporting that they spent less time supervising and training their CBPR student than students in alternative roles within their organization. While community partners appreciated the independent nature of CBPR students, some community partners asked for more face-to-face contact with students. Since other McMaster placement students have different roles than a CBPR students they are required to be on-site in order to complete a set number of hours at the organization. Thus, it is easier for a community partner to maintain frequent, face-to-face communication with a placement student. However with the aforementioned, it is important to note that community partners consistently identified the unique nature of both types of McMaster partnerships – each with distinct processes and outcomes – that make these experiences difficult to compare and rank. Further, it was consistently expressed that both forms of McMaster partnerships were equally valued by the organizations.

When asked about their overall experience conducting a CBPR project, community partners reported that 82.7% (24 out of 29 respondents) of all CBPR projects conducted held and maintained the principles of CBPR (i.e. equal partnership in all phases of research and that the
research addresses something of importance to the community) throughout the entirety of the project. Nonetheless, 10.3% (3 out of 29 respondents) of community partners reported that the principles of CBPR were present at some, but not all, stages of their work with the student-researcher and supervisor. Finally, 6.9% (2 out of 29 respondents) stated that these fundamental principles of CBPR were not held or maintained during the project.

Despite challenges that may arise throughout the process, 100% of community partners indicated that they would continue to build partnerships and work with Engaging the City on future research projects for a multitude of reasons: (a) the benefits of collaboration on such partnerships between community organizations, student-researchers and academic supervisors; (b) the CBPR project helped provide evidence-based support for the work of the community organization; (c) the educational component of the project enabled the community partner to formally understand their research topic and community further; (d) the community partner’s belief in education for a student and their desire to help students learn and develop; and (e) the organization’s lack of resources available to dedicate to research generation and knowledge. Additionally, it is important to note that even community partners who reported their experience to be challenging or less than ideal, stated that they would continue to partner because of one or more of the listed benefits of the partnership. There was a general consensus among all responding community partners that they were appreciative of the work conducted as a cost-effective resource for them.

Given that all community partners indicated the inclination for a continued partnership for CBPR projects, it is important to understand a proper methodology for continued feedback on these partnerships. For community partners, it was specified that any form of feedback they
may provide in the future must be convenient, timely, and accurately representative of the experience conducting the project. This typically varied and was personalized with each community partner and the nature of their work. Mediums for feedback that were convenient for the community partner included all three forms which were used for this evaluation (online survey, telephone or in-person interview). Similarly, the interval at which feedback should occur varied based on the community partner; however, generally, ideal times to receive feedback would be at an interim point within the project and yearly. However, almost universally, community partners stated that these timelines should be fluid and compress or expand according to the student-researcher and their performance. Finally, community partners also stated that the review of the projects should vary depending on the time and nature of feedback. For example, an interim review may only include the community partner and academic supervisor and then following the project’s completion, feedback may include the community partner, academic supervisor and student-researcher.

**DISCUSSION**

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a unique form of research that establishes an equal partnership between community-based organizations, academic researchers, and student-researchers in order to address a topic that is of importance to the community (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Both researchers from the university and community partners bring a unique set of experiences, perspectives and expertise to the chosen topic, enriching the intentionality and level of care given to the research process. Through this
collaboration, community-based participatory researchers can work to produce positive and impactful changes within their community.

*Engaging the City* has completed 52 CBPR projects with 27 community partners and 53 student-researchers in its first five years, from September 2008 to April 2013. To ensure that each one of these projects, and the projects of future years, are informed by the principles of CBPR, community partners were asked to comment on whether they felt their experience addressed a topic identified by the community and involved an equal partnership between the community and the university in all phases of the research process. An overwhelming majority agreed that their projects reflected the principles of CBPR. However, there were some community partners who did not feel that an equal partnership was maintained throughout. In particular, some community partners (10.3%) felt the process could have been more participatory on their part. Thus, it is important for community partners, academic supervisors and student-researchers to continually evaluate whether their partnerships do reflect the principles of CBPR.

The literature on CBPR cautions that a challenge inherent in this approach to research is the power differential that may exist in the complex dynamic between representatives of the community and of the university. In a research context, academics from the university are seen as “experts” and the expertise of the community can often be overshadowed by the university institution (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). To explore whether these notions are present, community partners were asked to express any hesitations they had in initially partnering with McMaster University’s *Engaging the City*. Not one of the community representatives referred to the concept of ‘power-differentials’ as a concern. Rather, the hesitations primarily revolved around the time commitment required of the community partner to co-supervise a student-
researcher, working around the students’ schedules, and whether the student assigned to them would match the values and principles of their organization. Essentially, community partners’ hesitations revolved around the unknown elements associated with beginning a new project such as CBPR, which is common when stepping into any unfamiliar experience.

The absence of a power differential in the relationship between the academic institution and community partners may be a testament to the approach taken by the academic supervisors in forming and maintaining these partnerships. This approach is guided by the objective to support community partners through research in a way that is, first and foremost, feasible and accessible to community partners when considering their unique needs, time, and resources. To mitigate other hesitations community partners may have for future projects, academic supervisors can open dialogue with community partners about their reservations early and throughout the entirety of the project.

Despite the hesitations community partners may have had, they recognize the value in having participated in a CBPR project because research is critical in supporting their work in a way that is objective and evidence-based. For example, the results of the research have been used to support grant applications and the development of new programs, among other things (Figure 4). Many community partners expressed that it is a challenge to conduct research for their organization due to a lack of resources and/or staff to generate research. *Engaging the City* helps to fill this need by pairing these community organizations with student-researchers, who have been equipped with the basic knowledge and skills to engage in this unique research approach. The resulting partnership allows community partners to conduct research they
otherwise would not be able to and simultaneously allows students to further develop their research skills.

Additionally, the relationship that develops between the community partner and the student-researcher is one of the reasons why community partners value CBPR and continue to work with *Engaging the City*. They enjoy working closely with students who are enthusiastic and passionate about community engagement. Community partners also expressed the rewards found in being part of the student’s learning process. The learning does not just occur at the level of the student, however, as many community partners disclosed that their learning throughout the process was significant as well, thus creating an interdependent partnership.

Community partners became aware of the opportunity to conduct CBPR through outreach from an academic supervisor, a student-researcher who was specifically interested in working with the organization, or through word-of-mouth by an existing community partner. While this method of recruitment has lead *Engaging the City* to partner with 45 community-based organizations in the Hamilton-Burlington area, establishing partnerships in a more systematic manner may allow *Engaging the City* to make broader connections in the community. That said, the academic supervisors are also aware that community partners may be inundated with requests from students and university faculty across faculties who wish to work with, support, or be supported by the community partner’s services. As much as community partners wish to engage students and the university, they only have limited time and resources to meet these requests. Thus, while reaching out to potential community partners in a systematic manner may ensure equal opportunity for them to conduct CBPR, academic supervisors must be cautious not to impose a burdensome demand on community organizations. Finding a balance between
providing equal opportunity for community partners to conduct research, and community partner’s time and resources to support that research, is critical.

The student-researchers conducting CBPR are an integral component to the research process. These projects typically serve as the student’s undergraduate thesis, which is a six- or nine-unit credit, equivalent to the workload of two or three university courses, respectively; thus, the student invests a great deal of time in these projects. Furthermore, the academic supervisors greatly value their relationship with community partners and strive to make the research process as smooth as possible for the organization. As such, it is of importance to evaluate, from the perspective of the community partner with whom students work closely, how students are adapting to their research role and whether improvements can be made for future partnerships. In order to investigate this, community partners were asked to comment on a variety of measures regarding their experience working with a student-researcher, including: level of trust with the student, student’s ability to meet their expectations, communication with the student, and the student’s preparedness and professionalism.

Communication with the student-researcher was, from the community partner’s perspective, the most significant challenge of the research process. Improvement to communication is perhaps the most important because it is a significant topic in itself, but it is also a component that affects virtually all other aspects of the partnership. For example, communication affects the level of professionalism community partners perceive the student to have, as well as the alignment of expectations between the community partner and the student, among other things. The impact of communication will be considered further when measures of the community partner’s experience with a student-researcher are discussed.
Community partners indicated that they would like to have more communication and more consistent communication with the student-researcher, as well as different forms of communication. This communication does not necessarily need to take the form of a lengthy meeting, but rather they expressed that a quick update from the student via email or telephone would suffice; this would help community partners feel more informed about the progress of the project, especially since scheduling in-person meetings can be difficult. Communication from the community partner to the student is also important to consider. Community partners have large demands on their time and thus, it is also a challenge for them to maintain contact with the student-researcher in a timely manner. Students should be encouraged to follow up with community partners regularly in order to ensure that both the community partner’s and student’s needs for the project are being met.

The large demands on the time of community partner must be delicately balanced with the increased frequency of communication they desire. The student-researcher and the community partner must work together to discover a means of communicating that works for both parties, and they must continually evaluate whether their current frequency and form of communication is effective at multiple points throughout the duration of the project. For example, communication may be frequent and in-person during the data collection phase of the research, but may be revised to less frequent emails during data analysis since this phase of the research can, for the most part, be conducted independently by the student. Each partnership is unique and as such each partnership’s communication will look different.

Community partners were also asked to comment on the student-researcher’s level of preparation throughout the research process with respect to their research capacity. As
aforementioned, students are required to participate in a four-month course (HTH SCI 3DD3; Figure 1, phase A) on best practices of CBPR in order to ensure that students have built sufficient research knowledge and skills before conducting CBPR at the senior level. It is important to evaluate the student’s research capacity in the event that improvements must be made to HTH SCI 3DD3 in order to better prepare future student-researchers.

The majority of community partners described their student-researcher or team of student-researchers as prepared at an exemplary level. However, 27.3% of community partners did express that a learning curve was present for students, notably in terms of participant recruitment and data collection (Figure 1, phases H and I). For example, when designing materials for these phases of the research process, it was a challenge for students to adjust their use of academic jargon; it is important to find a universal language that is accessible to all parties. It is unclear whether these comments stem from an inadequate development of research skills or a miscommunication of what the student was expected to execute; nonetheless, it affects the community partner’s perception of the student’s preparedness. Future students must consider how to communicate in a way that is most relevant for the population and organization they are working with. Furthermore, academic supervisors must closely monitor the student’s research skill development and ensure it is at an adequate level for the partnering community organization. In the event that the student requires more support for skill development, supervisors must work closely with the student to better facilitate their learning.

This evaluation also aimed to assess the level of trust community partners had in the student-researcher to carry out the important research they were conducting. Many community partners felt that their level of trust evolved over time, as they became better acquainted and
more comfortable with the student. Time required for trust to develop is characteristic of any new partnership that forms and it can be seen as natural in this context as well. It may, however, be beneficial for future students to build a foundation of trust earlier on in the partnership, since both community partner and student-researcher are greatly invested in the success of the CBPR project and may feel anxious about the formation of this new partnership.

To facilitate the building of trust, a community partner disclosed that their student-researcher volunteered at their organization during the beginning phases of their CBPR project (Figure 1, phases D to G), where the student’s work is largely off-site. Volunteering was beneficial during these beginning phases because it increases the amount of interaction between the community partner and the student-researcher without putting extra demands on the community partner’s time. Furthermore, through a volunteering role, the student is able to demonstrate a commitment to the organization and gain valuable knowledge and experience working with the population the organization supports.

Although there are many advantages to volunteering at the community partner’s organization, it is not a feasible option for all students and it is not required of CBPR student-researchers. There are other means to increase the amount of interaction between the community partner and the student in order to facilitate the building of trust. For example, regular and more frequent updates from the student may aid in building trust, a recommendation previously highlighted in this report.

Another component that may change as the project progresses is the community partner’s expectations of the project and the student-researcher. For example, as the project develops, the initial research objectives set out by the community partner, the academic
supervisor, and the student are revised and refined. However, if these revisions are not outlined clearly and discussed, a misalignment of expectations regarding the project’s objectives or how those objectives are to be carried out can occur. This misalignment in expectations can directly influence the impact of the results. For example, if the community partner’s vision of the research objectives is different from how the student understands that vision, the student may develop a project that cannot be utilized in a way the community partner originally intended, and thus diminish the impact of the results.

The role of the supervisor is critical in ensuring that both the student-researchers’ and the community partners’ expectations are being met. Acting as a liaison, academic supervisors must encourage the student and the community partner to clearly outline their expectations and intervene when these expectations do not align. Of course, it is reasonable for unforeseen circumstances to arise that alter the course of the project (e.g. a change in community partner resources dedicated to the CBPR project), but consistent communication around such challenges and how they affect the objectives and expectations of the project may help to circumvent any unintended circumstances at the end of the project. Thus, the need for flexibility is highlighted and the importance of communication is further underscored by all parties.

Expectations may also be misaligned in the process of conducting CBPR. A few community partners indicated that they did not expect the ethics approval process to take as long as it did, which impacted the student-researcher’s ability to complete all the research objectives initially outlined. This feedback was heard by academic supervisors prior to this formal evaluation. As such, steps have already been taken to expedite Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board
(HiREB) approval and shorten the typical 6-8 week process by having students work directly with Kristina Trim, a HiREB member, as they are developing their study design.

Considering this, the reasoning is unclear behind this particular piece of feedback. Perhaps the expedited process is still too lengthy from the community partner’s perspective; however, little more can be done without compromising the HiREB approval process. Perhaps academic supervisors must more clearly communicate the amount of time typically required for HiREB approval so that community partners are more aware that the process does take time.

Another hypothesis to explain this feedback emerged through our analysis of the data which is coloured by our previous experiences as student-researchers in Engaging the City. We hypothesize that the term ‘ethics’ may be used differently by the academic institution and community partners. To academic supervisors and student-researchers, the term ‘ethics’ is used to describe the formal HiREB approval process (Figure 1, phase G). To community partners, the term ‘ethics’ may be used to describe the entire beginning phases of the CBPR process (Figure 1, phases E to G), which includes ethics approval as well as background research and study design. Background research is required to immerse students in the research topic, which will inform study design. To design the study, students must create recruitment materials, consent forms, interview guides, questionnaires, and any other additional materials needed to begin data collection. All these materials must be completed in order to apply for ethics approval. As such, it follows that when the student is working on developing these materials, they might describe it to their community partner under the umbrella term ‘ethics’; and thus ‘ethics’ becomes a partial misnomer in terminology. It is hypothesized that the true meaning behind the community partner’s feedback is not that the expedited HiREB approval process is too lengthy, but rather
that the entire beginning phases (Figure 1, phases E to G) of the CBPR process is prolonged and during this time, there is limited communication. Additionally, community partners are often eager to move quickly through the preparatory phases of study design and ethics (Figure 1, phases E to G) and commence data collection which may add to their perception of a prolonged ‘ethics’ process.

Further research about this phase is needed clarify the reasoning behind this feedback and explore the veracity of the hypotheses outlined above. If, however, the hypothesis regarding ethics as a partial misnomer of terminology does hold merit, a recommendation would be to encourage academic supervisors and student-researchers to further involve community partners in the study design process leading up to ethics approval so that community partners can better understand the amount of time needed for this component of the process.

Overall, the process of conducting a CBPR project was positive for most community partners; their experience working directly with student-researchers served as a highlight for many community partners’ experiences. Although challenges did present themselves in the process, community partners value CBPR and want to continue their partnerships.

Another important component of this evaluation was to investigate how the results of CBPR projects are used by community-organizations. A variety of ways were mentioned, such as funding grants, development of new programs, advocacy, and education about a topic of importance to the community (Figure 4). Overall, the majority of community partners were content with the impact their results had, however this questionnaire item contained the most variation in responses. Community partners named a number of ways the results of the research were not used, which contributed to a lower impact of results score. These include: sharing the
results with other stakeholders in a public forum, funding, or community engagement. Additionally, some community partners expressed that they simply did not know how to use the results (the reasons of which were not elaborated). There are also a few factors to consider that affected the impact of results score, but were beyond the control of the student, community partner or academic supervisor. For example, results may have a diminished impact due to a lack of funding opportunities or a lack of support from external stakeholders. This score is also limited by the fact that some projects reviewed in this evaluation were recently completed (in the 2012-2013 academic year) and thus, the results have not yet had time to make an impact or reach their impact potential.

While it is at the discretion of the community partner to determine how the results will be used and the student-researcher has little influence, there is a step that can be taken by the student to ensure the community partner is inspired to use the results to their full potential. Academic institutions typically present the results of their research through a written report; however, such a report may not be how the community partner or the population they support wishes to receive information. Thus, having a discussion about the ways in which the results can be disseminated would be beneficial to ensure they are presented in a manner that can be used effectively by the community partner. Non-traditional dissemination could be through a consumer friendly brochure or a series of visual images or symbols that the community partner and the broader population can easily understand. Engaging in thoughtful discussion with the community partner about results dissemination could significantly increase the impact of the results (Chen, Diaz Lucas & Rosenthal, 2010).
Community partners were also asked to reflect on experiences they had working with other McMaster students (e.g. nursing students, social work students, etc.) and comment on how those partnerships differed from their partnership with CBPR student-researchers. Community partners saw equal value in both types of partnerships, but the partnerships differed in a number of ways. The amount of time spent with other McMaster students was greater than the amount of time spent with CBPR students. Typically, nursing or social work students are involved with the community organization through a placement and thus, are present on site more frequently in order to meet a required quota of hours. CBPR students are able to be self-directed in their research role, thus less time is spent in direct contact with the community partner. Community partners expressed their desire to spend more time with CBPR student-researchers as they do with placement students; however they do appreciate the nature of the CBPR project structure since it does not place a significant increased demand on their active schedules.

This is the first time that Engaging the City’s CBPR projects have been formally evaluated. The academic supervisors hear anecdotally from community partners about the processes and outcomes of their CBPR projects, however, this formal analysis objectively assesses how CBPR projects have developed over the last five years and how they may continue to develop in a manner that is beneficial to community organizations, student-researchers, and the McMaster academic population. As such, the academic supervisors hope to continue gathering feedback from community partners in subsequent years to ensure that partnerships continue to evolve and improve. Community partners were invited to share how they would like to provide future feedback in a convenient way. Many community partners felt that gathering feedback at the interim, to ensure the research process is on track, and yearly, after the completion of the CBPR
project, would be appropriate. Since 5 of the 10 CBPR projects conducted in the last year (2012-2013) could not comment on the impact of results due to recent completion, it may also be beneficial to conduct a follow-up evaluation one year later. This will allow time for the project’s results to be utilized and thus, provide a more accurate assessment of the project’s impact. Community partners also commented on different forms the feedback could take. They appreciated the convenience of an online survey, however, expressed concerns that a survey might not be able to represent their experiences as well as in-person conversation. Furthermore, in-person conversations give academic supervisors a chance to connect with community partners; and taking the time to schedule in-person meetings to gather community partner feedback emphasizes the value of the partnership.

It is important to note that while recommendations are made from the feedback of the community partner, there are limitations around the solutions proposed. The academic supervisors must take into account the community partner’s time, resources and needs, but must also consider the time, capacities and needs of their student-researchers. Furthermore, academic supervisors must also fulfill the requirements of the university, the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program, and the HiREB. Nonetheless, the above recommendations are significant in informing the academic supervisors of the challenges community partners may face in the process of conducting CBPR. These recommendations are simply meant to serve as a starting point for the academic supervisors to begin addressing community partner feedback.

We recognize that the community partner’s perspective on the research process is crucial, however, is not the only relevant perspective – the perspective of the student is also important.
to explore. As a continuation to this program evaluation, phase II will be launched to explore the processes and outcomes of CBPR projects from the student’s perspective.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this Forward with Integrity program evaluation. Engaging the City works with a variety of community partners, all of which contribute to their community in diverse ways. The topics of community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects completed in the last five years are unique to each community partner and the range of responses provided to the questionnaire items are reflective of this, particularly with respect to how the results of the project were implemented by the community partner. When considering the process of conducting CBPR, there were many similarities among community partners since the overall process is fairly standard (i.e. study design, Research Ethics Board approval, data collection, data analysis, dissemination, etc.). However, there are a myriad of ways to use the results of CBPR projects, which yielded a variety of responses to questionnaire items regarding project outcomes. Thus, when conducting thematic analysis techniques, many of the codes identified were not necessarily repeating themes, but varied and therefore were considered relevant to the overall goal of gathering information to evolve CBPR partnerships.

The data collection phase of this evaluation also presented some limitations. For a large proportion of community partners, a considerable amount of time had passed since their project was completed – as much as five years for projects which began in September 2008. Thus, the
responses of these community partners may be subject to retrospective bias. It is important to
gather community partner feedback in a timely manner for future CBPR projects.

Furthermore, the primary contact during the CBPR project may not have completed the
program evaluation; rather, another representative who was sufficiently knowledgeable about
the CBPR project spoke on behalf of the primary contact because he/she had moved from their
position at the community organization and/or was not available to provide feedback. In this
case, the representative interviewed could speak to the outcomes of the CBPR project, but could
not comment specifically about the process of conducting the project. While it is ideal to speak
with the primary contact, any feedback provided by community partners is valuable to consider.

The structure of the questionnaire (Appendix A) created for this program evaluation –
Evaluation of Community-Based Participatory Research Projects from the Community’s
Perspective – also presented some limitations. Several items on the questionnaire investigated
concepts that could be interpreted in multiple ways. For example, when considering whether the
student-researcher met the community partner’s expectations, it could be answered in reference
to the community partner’s expectations of (a) working with a McMaster student; (b) the
outcomes of the results; or (c) the CBPR process in general. There was not one consistent way
community partners answered questionnaire items. While it may be ideal for questionnaire items
to be more specific in order to avoid ambiguities, this is difficult to execute since the components
of a CBPR project are deeply intertwined. As such, many items on the questionnaire could not be
assessed as completely separate entities. For example, a lack of communication during the
process has implications for the community partner’s experience with the student, as well as the
results of the project. Additionally, due to the close connection between questionnaire items, it
was difficult to determine the specific root of some of the challenges named, and thus difficult
to appropriately address those challenges in the recommendations.

For questionnaire items involving a Likert scale, community partners found it difficult to
assign a definitive number to their assessment of the student-researcher since these scores
typically changed over the course of the project. Many community partners gave a rating
corresponding to their perspective at the start and end of the project. Acknowledging that these
ratings will most likely change over time, and providing a space for community partners to discuss
changes would be ideal for gathering feedback in the future. Additionally, discrepancies existed
when examining the scores given quantitatively on Likert scales and the corresponding
qualitative responses to those scales. For example, when rating communication on the evaluative
questionnaire, only two community partners gave students a rating of 3 or below (less than
adequate to poor) on the 7-point Likert scale, but many more of the community partners’
qualitative responses suggested that they were not as satisfied with this aspect of their
experience working with the student-researcher. It is hypothesized that this discrepancy exists
because community partners may have been more comfortable providing constructive feedback
qualitatively, rather than quantitatively, in order to better provide context to their experience.

Another factor that may have influenced the presence of this discrepancy is the biases
that may arise with performing a program evaluation with research assistants from McMaster
University, who are former Engaging the City students. While community partners were
encouraged to answer honestly, were assured that their responses would not affect their existing
relationships with McMaster and Engaging the City, and were comfortable to disclose some
negative feedback, community partner’s hesitations surrounding full disclosure may still have been present.

As aforementioned, there are factors beyond the control of the community partner or the student-researcher which may negatively affect the score given to the impact of results, such as a lack of funding or support from external stakeholders. In addition, sufficient time may not have passed to allow the results to have an impact, and thus a score could not be given. It is important to keep these factors and their complexities in mind when considering the impact of results.

Lastly, the results of this program evaluation are only applicable to CBPR projects conducted in Hamilton, since these projects are tailored specifically to Engaging the City community partners. While the results are not generalizable to other communities, the model of CBPR developed by the Engaging the City supervisors to support community organizations can be a foundation for other community initiatives within and outside of Hamilton.

**CONCLUSION**

This is the first program evaluation conducted for community-based research (CBPR) projects supported by Engaging the City during its six years. Academic supervisors gathered feedback from community partners anecdotally, however a formal evaluation was deemed necessary to obtain an objective reflection on how academic supervisors and student-researchers can best continue supporting community-based organizations in Hamilton through research.
The most significant challenges identified by community partners in conducting CBPR projects was maintaining adequate communication with the student-researcher and having the opportunity to use the results of the project to their full potential. Despite these challenges, all of the community partners interviewed expressed their willingness to partner for another CBPR project. This claim is attributable to community partners identifying that research is a critical piece in supporting their work in a way that is objective and evidence-based. Furthermore, community partners benefited from the process of working with committed and enthusiastic students.

In order to gather a complete assessment of how CBPR can be improved for future years, a second phase of this program evaluation will be launched. Phase II will focus on the student-researcher’s perspective of the processes and outcomes of conducting a CBPR project. Together, both the student’s and the community partner’s perspective will form a complete view on best practices for Engaging the City to conduct CBPR in the Hamilton community.
REFERENCES


Evaluation of Community-Based Participatory Research Projects from the Community’s Perspective

Welcome to our questionnaire. This questionnaire aims to review the partnerships involved in the community-based research course with Sarah Glen and Margaret Secord. We hope to gain perspective on the process of completing your community research project with us and the outcomes of the project thereafter. The following is 10-items long and will take about 15-20 minutes of your time depending on how much you would like to share with us. While you are completing the questionnaire, please be assured that your name and/or organization will not be linked to your answers and the information you provide will be kept confidential. Thank you.

1. Description of Research project

2. How did you get involved with this community-based research project?

3. There can be a lot of potential when the community and the university work together. Despite this potential, we understand that sometimes there can be some hesitations when partnering with the university. When you initially considered doing a research project with Sarah and/or Margaret did you have any hesitations when partnering with us? If so, can you describe them?

4. The following questions address your experience working with your student[s] on your community-based research project. For each of these categories, please rate your experience from 1-7, and give a brief explanation behind your rating.

   - Level of trust
     
     | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
     |
     | Exemplary | Adequate | Poor |

   - Expectations being met
     
     | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
     |
     | Exemplary | Adequate | Poor |

   - Student preparation (research skills)
     
     | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
     |
     | Exemplary | Adequate | Poor |
• Communication

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• Overall professionalism (work ethic, punctuality, respectful, reaching out for help and support)

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• Impact of research project within your organization

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• Overall experience with student[s]

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5. How were you able to use the results of the project? Please check all that apply.

- [ ] Access funding
- [ ] Develop new programs
- [ ] Modify existing programs
- [ ] Increase enrollment in existing programs
- [ ] Understand the research topic in more detail
- [ ] I did not use the results of this project
- [ ] Other: __________________________

  a. Was there a way you were hoping to use the results that you didn’t have the opportunity to?

6. Have you done more than one research project with our community-based research course?

  a. If yes, what are some reasons why you continue to partner with us?
  b. If no, would you consider partnering with us again for another project? If not, why?
7. Have you worked with other McMaster students in the past?
   a. If yes, has your partnership with the community-based research project differed from other relationships you have had with other McMaster students? Please indicate how:
      - Time spent (i.e. supervision, training)
      - Project structure (i.e. hands-on, self-directed)
      - Outcome (i.e. value for organization, value for university)
      - It has not differed from other relationships with McMaster students

8. In preparation for conducting research projects with our community partners, students are required to take a course that introduces them to the core principles of CBPR. Generally speaking, they describe that community-based participatory research should involve equal partnership between the community and the university in all phases of the research – from thinking of the research topic to the sharing of the results – and that the research topic addresses something that is of importance to the community partner. Do you feel the relationship you had with us reflected these principles? Why or why not?

9. In the event that you do another community-based research project, how would you like to provide feedback to us in the future?

10. Is there anything else you’d like to share?

— END—
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [NAME OF COMMUNITY PARTNER]

We hope this email finds you well. Our names are Lorraine Valmadrid and Jennifer Pearson. We are research assistants at McMaster University working with Margaret Secord and Sarah Glen. Their names may ring a bell in your mind because you worked on a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project with [NAME OF CBPR PROJECT SUPERVISOR] in [YEAR OF PROJECT] along with her student [STUDENT-RESEARCHER]. More specifically, it is my understanding that together you looked [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF CBPR PROJECT]

[STUDENT-RESEARCHER] was introduced to this project through a CBPR course at McMaster called Community Collective Thesis. Through this course McMaster students and community partners have worked together to conduct CBPR projects addressing issues that align with the goals of our community partners. After 5 years of working on the course, Margaret and Sarah feel that it is the time for us to reconnect with our community partners to better chart where we have been and what impact the research generated through these projects have had on our community partners. By having a better understanding of the experiences of our community partners, we hope to improve our work with them on future projects.

I would like to meet with you to chat a little bit about how your experience was partnering with [PROJECT SUPERVISOR] and [STUDENT-RESEARCHER] for your community research project. Please let us know a time when you would be available to chat. We have a questionnaire for you, but we can discuss the details further when we connect. You can contact us by email at [EMAIL ADDRESS].

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us. We look forward to meeting with you and learning about your experience with the Community Collective Thesis.

Warm Regards,

Jennifer Pearson and Lorraine Valmadrid
You Shared. We Listened.

Please Join Us For an Open House

The president of McMaster University, Patrick Deane, provided us with a Forward With Integrity Grant which has allowed us to hear from you about our collective efforts.

Join us to learn about how our community-based research projects have been helping to shape our community and city.

NOVEMBER 27TH, 2013
4PM-5:30PM
The Design Annex
118 James Street North

RSVP to Jennifer or Lorraine by:
November 13, 2013 at
feedback.cbpr@learnlink.mcmaster.ca

Refreshments will be served.
Presentation at 4:30PM
ASSESSING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECTS IN THE HAMILTON COMMUNITY: THE COMMUNITY PARTNER’S PERSPECTIVE

Margaret Secord, MA & Sarah Glen, MA
Research Assistants: Jennifer Pearson & Lorraine Valmadrid
Bachelor of Health Sciences Program
McMaster University
A MESSAGE FROM THE FACILITATORS...

November 27, 2013

To Our Community Partners,

Thank you for joining us in celebrating our work together on our community-based participatory research projects (CBPR) throughout the city of Hamilton. We hope that today serves as a small token of our appreciation for the important work you do with us on these projects and in our partnerships. We hope this open house will be insightful and allow both you and us to further our CBPR community.

In 2008, after many meetings in cafes, community centres, art galleries and other local hot spots, we began our journey in developing a framework that would support a way for students at McMaster to understand our community’s fabric beyond volunteering, service learning and other community engagement initiatives. It was important to us that this not only be an opportunity to encourage McMaster students to connect with community organizations in both theory and practice, but that this initiative build sustainable, purposeful and mutually beneficial relationships with community organizations or, you, our community partners. As such, the course 3DD3 Engaging the City was born.

Throughout the development of the course, we have worked together with you to continuously review and evaluate each of our CBPR projects during and following their completion. Given that it has been five years since we began some of our first partnerships with you, we felt that it was time for us to reconnect with all of our community partners to better chart where we have been and what impact the research generated through these projects have had on you, our community partner, and our community. By having a better understanding of your experiences we hope to improve our work with you on future collaborations and further build the community between all of you. Fortunately, we were not the only ones to recognize and believe in the importance of reflection and gaining perspective on our past projects, as Dr. Patrick Deane and McMaster University felt that this reflection and research was important in improving our CBPR projects with you. Through a Forward with Integrity grant, Dr. Deane was able to provide us with the means to assess the projects we have done together and see how we can move forward in conducting improved CBPR projects between McMaster and the Hamilton Community.

Thank you once again for your continued partnership and support as we not only continue this work together but strive to make improvements to your experience working on CBPR projects with us and our students. Without your passion and dedication to serving and changing our community, none of this, nor our work together would be possible.

Thank you,

Margaret Secord & Sarah Glen
YOUR FEEDBACK...

What Topics Can CBPR Explore?

In the past 5 years of conducting CBPR projects in the Hamilton community, a wide variety of research topics have been explored. This diversity is a reflection of how unique each one of your organization are in the work you do and the people you support. A few of the general ways CBPR projects are used are:

- To gain knowledge
  - About a specific research topic you are interested in
  - About the people you support or aim to target
  - About your capacities as an organization
- To evaluate how existing programs are impacting your community
- To develop new programs that address the needs of your community
- To develop tools that can be used by your community or your organization

The Process

We asked you about what the process was like to work on a CBPR project with a McMaster University student and facilitator. And as with any new experience, there are aspects of the process that you valued, and a few aspects that we could work on for future collaborations.

What did you enjoy?

- Working with dedicated and bright students
- Being part of the student’s learning process
- Collective effort between community partner, facilitator & student, where all those participating were engaged in the work and were committed to the success of the project
- As many of you are small organizations, gathering resources to perform objective, evidence-based research can prove to be difficult. Thus, having a student-researcher contribute their time made research more accessible.

Where did you want to see improvements?

- More frequent communication between the community partner and the student
- Working with students can be challenging due to the demands on their schedules by the university institution (e.g. exams). It would be helpful to see a better alignment of the student and the community partner’s schedules.
- Emphasize the importance of developing a trusting, working-relationship between community partner and student
- Having the student and the community partner adopt a common language around jargon used academically and in social service
- Presentation of the results in a way that is useful to the community partner (e.g. are there ways to present the results of the project other than a written report?)
YOUR FEEDBACK...

The Results

How were you able to use the results of the CBPR projects?

Since there are a wide variety of research topics explored, there a plethora of unique and different ways that all of you used the results of our partnership and our research together. Some (but by no means all) of the ways the results of CBPR projects were used are:

- Understanding your chosen research topic in further detail
- Increased community awareness and education
- Development of strategic planning for your organization
- Accessing funding for your organization
- Development of new programs and/or modification and/or continuation of existing projects and programs
- Development of new partnerships
- Understanding the limitations of your capabilities to provide services alone. This produces further options for collaboration between you and other community organizations in Hamilton.

Where did the results fall short?

While we believe in the work that we do together, we must recognize that improvements can always be made in partnerships and this was no exception with the results of our CBPR projects. We hope that by better understanding how we can improve the results of our research together we can further improve the impact that this research has on your organization and the Hamilton community as a whole.

- CBPR projects are dynamic in nature and while we encourage the projects to change and evolve to best fit the needs of the research and overcome unforeseen hurdles, it is important that we openly communicate together to ensure that everyone’s expectations evolve with the research.
- Sometimes determining how to best share the results of our CBPR projects with your organization as a whole, the greater Hamilton community and beyond can be difficult and can often impact how you feel you are able to effectively use the results. We need to work together to ensure that our research is disseminated in more accessible ways.
- We need to work together to ensure, not only the sustainability of our partnerships, but also the sustainability of the results so that the findings are not only used in the short-term for your organization but continuously in the future of your work.
YOUR FEEDBACK...

A few things we all need to keep in mind when looking at the results of our work together...

Sometimes when reflecting on the impact of your projects, not enough time had passed since their completion and potentially, there could be further ways the results of some of our projects will be used in the near future. Additionally, while we can always strive to improve the results of our CBPR projects, due to the nature of our work together sometimes things beyond your, the student’s or our own control. While this may be seen as a frustration for all of us involved, it is important to realize that despite these external limitations, the work we do together can do great things.

Why do CBPR?

Together, we strive to evolve our partnerships and the connection between McMaster and the community, because we believe that conducting CBPR together is important for...

- The generation of knowledge with a purpose, rather than knowledge for its own sake
- Building relationships between McMaster University and the Hamilton community
- Providing you with the resources to do evidence-based research
- Providing education opportunities not only for students, but for community-partners and facilitators as well
- Producing results that are applicable and action oriented, enabling positive change to be created in the community

Next Steps...

We will work to implement the feedback you have given us in the coming year, and in about a year’s time we aim to report back what actions we have taken to evolve our partnerships. We will also continue to formally gather your feedback as we continue to conduct CBPR projects. Lastly, we hope to move forward with a second phase of the research, which is to gather the student’s perspective on their experiences conducting CBPR in the Hamilton community.
A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO...

DR. PATRICK DEANE & LAURA HARRINGTON for providing us with the means to conduct this research,

DR. DEL HARNISH, TERESA BASILLIO & THE BHSC STAFF for their support throughout the process,

ALLISON AULENBACK & THE DESIGN ANNEX for providing us with a space to connect,

VANESSA AVERSA, CLARENCE CHAN, YENAH SEO, & JIMMY ZHANG for your musical talents,

MARK LEE for photography,

and most importantly, YOU, our community partners. None of these CBPR projects would be possible without your dedication and passion for the work you do.

If you would like to continue providing us with feedback on your experience conducting CBPR, please do not hesitate to reach out to Margaret Secord or Sarah Glen at:

Margaret.secord@learnlink.mcmaster.ca
Sarah.glen@learnlink.mcmaster.ca

We would be happy to hear from you.