



Community- Engaged Entrepreneurship Research

Methodologies
to Advance Equity
and Inclusion

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Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Research

Methodologies to advance equity and inclusion

Introduction

Community engagement, for many types of research projects, can markedly strengthen research relevance and adoption.

In community-engaged research models, researchers collaborate with members of the community who are closest to, or experiencing, the research questions or contexts being studied. In these models, researchers uplift community ideas and perspectives – they see community members as experts in their own experiences, and they believe that their participation can improve research relevance and rigor.

Community-engaged research, in addition to improving research impact, is also often undertaken in an effort to mitigate the conditions that have created distance and mistrust between researchers and community members. Traditional methods of social science research have often been perceived as extractive by communities – particularly systemically marginalized communities. This disconnect between researchers, and the communities in which they work, has a long history. Years of harm and exploitation by researchers has created significant wariness. This distance and distrust often grows as researchers and policymakers – those who are framing and proposing solutions to socioeconomic problems – circulate recommendations and interventions on communities that are the subjects of the research, but who were not involved in substantive discussion about the work.

Historically, research on entrepreneurship and innovation has rarely been conducted using community-engaged methodologies – even in work that seeks to address barriers to entrepreneurship in systemically marginalized communities. There is a significant body of traditional academic research on impediments to entrepreneurship for these groups. While policymakers and entrepreneurship support organizations (ESOs) have taken this research seriously, their efforts to address these challenges based on the academic findings have not always been successful in resolving problems or in creating more equitable opportunities. Despite the abundance of research, programs, and policies devoted to breaking down these barriers, systemically marginalized groups continue to pursue entrepreneurship at lower rates and experience less entrepreneurial success when they start new businesses.¹ There is growing evidence that the findings that emerge from established methods of academic research (1) often fail to resonate with the communities; and (2) lack the applicability policy stakeholders need to enact change.

At the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, we believe we can improve entrepreneurship outcomes by supporting community-engaged research. Community-centered approaches are important, particularly in areas of scholarship exploring entrepreneurship barriers among groups who have historically been harmed in the research process – whose experiences “traditional” research methods might fail to accurately capture. There are, in fact, researchers who have started to adopt these methods and are including entrepreneurs and other community stakeholders in their research processes to better understand the intersection between entrepreneurship and inclusive prosperity. The Kauffman Foundation has developed new grant initiatives to fund this type of work, and we hope to learn from and with these researchers and community partners. We believe that including the voices of entrepreneurs in the research process may produce more nuanced and robust findings that, ultimately, can serve as the basis for programs and policies that could truly change the landscape of entrepreneurship in the United States.

This report is part of our effort to begin to share our thinking around this approach to research and to highlight the work of our grantees who are conducting community-engaged research related to entrepreneurship. At a high level, this report includes:

- An overview of our Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Research portfolio as well as grantee project summaries
- Discussion of limitations the traditional research model imposes
- An outline of what exactly engagement can look like at various stages of the research process
- A review of some of the proven benefits of engagement in research

The report closes with some highlights of our thinking around this work, including evolving ideas around areas of research this work could support and ways our own grantmaking could shift to better support engagement in the research process.

The Kauffman Foundation's community-engaged entrepreneurship research portfolio

The Kauffman Foundation is taking steps to encourage more community-engaged, partnered, and co-produced research on entrepreneurship from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Just as we have found that engaging with entrepreneurs and listening to their stories has strengthened our grantmaking and programmatic work more broadly, we expect that greater community engagement in the research we fund will enhance our ability to advance more equitable and inclusive opportunities for entrepreneurs from a wide range of backgrounds.

In 2021, the Foundation initiated a Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Research portfolio, soliciting proposals from established research teams who were already engaging communities on projects related to entrepreneurship. The Foundation selected six of these projects for its first funding cohort. These grants are intended to broaden our understanding of and experience with community-engaged methodologies in entrepreneurship research and to support researchers and communities in a holistic and contextualized discovery of the barriers facing underrepresented entrepreneurs. The six project teams the Foundation selected for funding represent the organizations listed below:

- Hunter College, CUNY and Brooklyn Communities Collaborative, Inc. (BCC)
- University of Michigan and Jefferson East, Inc.
- Virginia Commonwealth University and RVA Works
- University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) Center for Neighborhoods
- University of California at San Diego, and United Taxi Workers of San Diego (UTWSD)
- McNair Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth

The grantees who are part of this portfolio — scholars who are skilled in and developing skills in community-engaged research, as well as the community partners who are working alongside them — are part of a three-year cohort that the Foundation has convened regularly to engage in peer-to-peer engagement and public-facing share outs of their learnings. We expect that the collaboration between this cohort and our program officers will increase the visibility and adoption of these methodologies within entrepreneurship and innovation research. We also anticipate that findings from this portfolio will provide practical insights and knowledge for communities, ESOs, ecosystem stakeholders, policymakers, researchers, and funders regarding ways to support equity and inclusion in the research process and to develop more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems. We will publish insights from this work, including specific research findings, after the grantees complete their projects, and we will continue sharing our evolving thinking and approach to this work through virtual forums.

Beyond this pilot grant initiative and cohort, the Foundation has recently funded a number of other community-engaged research partnerships. In 2022, we supported six more community-engaged research teams as part of our [Inclusive Ecosystems RFP](#). And through our support for the [Urban Institute's Community-Engaged Methods Resource Center](#), we expect that we will be able to provide tools and templates for entrepreneurship researchers that are designed to deepen the capacity for scholars to engage in this approach.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND RESEARCHERS FROM THE URBAN INSTITUTE COLLABORATE IN DATA ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION DURING A DATA WALK EVENT IN WASHINGTON, DC.

PHOTOS TAKEN BY RHIANNON NEWMAN.

Limits of the academic research model

In the traditional academic model, researchers often begin a new project by reviewing existing academic research to find a “gap” they can fill. They develop and propose research projects for funding alone or in collaboration with other academics. They select communities or data sets to explore their question without significant involvement from those with lived experience related to the question their research is examining. And they disseminate findings from this work primarily through peer-reviewed academic journals or through conversations at academic conferences. Their results, then, are often received by an academic audience long after the study has concluded, and the academic field grows and refines its understanding of social problems primarily through insular conversation — between scholars or between scholars and high-level policy stakeholders.

This process fails to include those who are experiencing or are closest to the issues that researchers are exploring. The questions that researchers address are not necessarily those that are most important to the community members; community members who participate in surveys or focus groups are very rarely compensated fairly; research findings may be framed in ways that can directly or indirectly harm communities; and these findings rarely reach the stakeholders closest to the questions addressed in the research. Moreover, the communities in which the research was conducted rarely experience benefits or even changes as a result of the work.

This exclusion from the process is compounded by power asymmetries between researchers and community members. Researchers often have higher status and income than the subjects of their studies, and their positions in institutes of higher education give them credibility, security, and power that community members often lack. Policymakers and the general community often value research findings more than community expertise; researchers’ framing of problems, and their ideas for interventions are privileged and believed over those of the community. In a very real sense, then, traditional academic research is often conducted at the expense of the communities it examines — especially those that are systemically marginalized. Communities can experience harm during the research process or as a result of its methodology or findings, and they often see little benefit from the research results.

Historically, academic work has created significant harm for marginalized communities and has been used to justify or perpetuate additional damage. Many research fields, for example, were born during the colonial era, with explicitly political and nationalist goals. Researchers at that time worked to establish categories, ranks, and stages of “societal progress,” and these subjective and misleading hierarchies were often used to rationalize colonial conquest.² More recently, craniometry, an established area of science through the 1940s, was used to support genocidal Nazi policies.³ And during the mid-20th century in the U.S., the federal government infamously failed to offer hundreds of Black men in rural Alabama informed consent or treatment in a syphilis study that used autopsies to investigate the damage that untreated syphilis causes to the human body.⁴ As a result of this history, members of many systemically marginalized communities do not trust researchers, do not believe that research will lead to meaningful change, and are not willing to participate in research projects.^{5,6}

THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

In 1974, in the aftermath of the gross ethical violations in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) were created in the U.S. to protect research subjects and prevent further ethical violations in research. For most university-based researchers, the IRB at their institution is the chief governing body over research.⁷ These boards are meant to provide guidance and oversight that ensures that all research at the institution adheres to established ethical standards and that the rights of subjects of all research projects are protected. IRBs, however, were not designed and are not equipped to guide researchers beyond basic human subjects protections. They often are not familiar with community-engaged research frameworks, and they may not recognize the inherent imbalances of power, the inadequate compensation of community members, and the failures to respect the perspectives of community members as problems.

A recent example of the ongoing extractive consequences of research that meets current IRB standards can be seen in a study that USDA botanists conducted on the medicinal use of yew tree bark by Pacific Northwest tribes. Their published finding that a chemical in the bark can stop cancerous tumors from developing led to overharvesting, the endangerment of Pacific yew, and resource loss for Indigenous peoples.⁸

Collaboration between researchers and community members

Community-engaged research models, by contrast, can be defined as approaches that involve community members – those closest to or experiencing the issue being studied. In this context, “community” refers to a group of people who are similar to one another in specific ways. It can mean a geographical community, such as the group of people who live in the same neighborhood or town, or a social community, in which members share interests, culture, or certain aspects of their identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion).⁹ As a result of these shared attributes, members of a community also typically share some common experiences, ideologies, or behaviors.¹⁰

Community-engaged research is often seen primarily as a lens or framework for research rather than as a strict methodology.

It is work that is guided by the understanding that (1) community members are experts in their own experiences; (2) their participation can improve research relevance and rigor; and (3) an ethical approach to research demands that community members should be involved in the identification of the challenges and opportunities that face their communities and in the development of interventions to address them. This perspective advances equity, reciprocity, and trust between researchers and populations that may have historically experienced extraction or harm as a result of academic research.

Community-engaged research can include partnerships between researchers and local organizations (such as ESOs), government institutions, or individual community members. It means that **researchers and community members collaborate in various ways and at different stages throughout the research process – jointly producing knowledge that benefits not only researchers, but also community members themselves.** It is driven by researchers’ asset focus, which ensures that they recognize and utilize the unique expertise that each community member brings to the table. And it requires ongoing communication, transparency, trust, and respect between community members and research partners.

Academic fields have developed a wide range of community-engaged research methodologies. Even within a single field, there may be significant variation in the amount and type of collaboration between researchers and communities from project to project, depending on the scope of the project, its methodology, its context, and the perspectives of the researchers. As the profiles of our Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Research portfolio teams will highlight, there are myriad specific methodologies that exist under the banner of community engagement (community-based participatory research and participatory action research, for example). In some cases, researchers may choose to engage community perspectives at either just the start or closing of a project. In these cases, community input provides valuable context that guides the development of the research plan or the interpretation of research findings. In research projects that are more strongly community-led or co-produced, community stakeholders may be more heavily involved in the development and implementation of the research methodology, the decision-making and execution of the research, or the dissemination of conclusions to the community. In these cases, community members act as thought partners throughout the knowledge creation process.¹¹ All community-engaged research endeavors will involve some degree of compromise between community partners and researchers. Below, we outline the various stages of most community-engaged research projects, and we highlight the ways that researchers and community members may collaborate at each stage.¹²

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH – LEADERSHIP BY SYSTEMICALLY MARGINALIZED SCHOLARS

The development of community-engaged approaches to knowledge creation have often been led by researchers who hold systemically marginalized identities. Many of these pioneers in community-engaged approaches advocated for these methods because they had witnessed first-hand the divorce between academic theory and the realities of systemically marginalized community members’ lives. Many researchers in developing countries have been instrumental in promoting this approach to research as well. In fact, participatory research and research that places greater value on participants’ experiences and expertise, particularly in the areas of agriculture and development, were strengthened in response to largely Western-led intervention development.¹³ Even today, studies show that scholars of color and those who identify as women are more likely to utilize community-engaged methods of research and to think of academia as a vehicle to influence positive social change.¹⁴

Determining project focus or research direction. For scholars, the first step in any research project is often identifying the question(s) they seek to answer through their work. In community-engaged research, researchers center community need and perspective in the development of a research project and ensure that they are answering a question that is important to the community. As such, the focus of a research project can be driven by community members, researchers, or both in collaboration. In some cases, community members (such as leaders from local ESOs, community development organizations, or entrepreneurs themselves) initiate research projects. They may propose a collaborative project with researchers because they have a specific challenge or question they would like to explore but they lack the capacity or resources to carry out the necessary research. In other cases, researchers may have identified a particular community or region that would be a good context to study a particular research question. They may approach community organizations in the area to determine whether there is interest in participating in a partnership to explore the issue.

In all of these scenarios, the focus of the research may evolve as researchers and community members work together and learn from each other. Researchers, for example, may initially pursue research exploring capital access, but then actually discover, through conversation with those closest to the issue, that community leaders find the digital divide to be a more pressing issue for local entrepreneurs. In other cases, researchers and community partners may have parallel but separate goals for the project. For example, researchers may explore a question that is relevant within academic literature (such as, for example, disparate experiences by race for those accessing ESO services), while offering to collect and share data that the community partner needs (robust disaggregated demographic data, as one example).

Developing a research plan. A research plan lays out a researcher's intended approach to a project. It is a systematic outline of the research questions that will be asked, the data that will be needed to answer the research questions, the methodology that may work best for collecting data, and ideas for analysis and dissemination of results. Engaging with community members while developing and refining a research plan can clarify important questions for researchers. These discussions can determine, for example, whether this context or community is the right place to explore the issue, whether the research findings will be salient or useful enough to compensate the community members for the time they spend on the project, whether the needs and interests of all parties are addressed in the proposed work, and whether all relevant community leaders and partners are included.

Fundraising and allocating the budget. Project budgets vary based on methodology and scope, but research, in general, is expensive. Researchers typically need to submit proposals for planned research to foundations or other funding agencies months or even years in advance. Often, successful funding is based on a researcher's ability to craft a proposal that aligns with funders' priorities at an institutional level. As a result, researchers who are interested in engaging a community in their work may already have a set research plan and budget by the time they approach community leaders, which creates barriers to true collaboration.

As transparency and compensation of community labor are key tenets of community-engaged research, researchers who hope to engage communities after funding has already been secured often share copies of the project budget and proposal with community partners, and they seek to identify shared goals or alignment. If community expertise or labor will be involved in the research project (such as, for example, if local entrepreneurs will be asked to help increase awareness and participation in a research study), researchers may discuss compensation rates with community partners, and they may either reallocate existing budget lines to cover these costs or seek additional funding. If, however, funding has not been secured prior to approaching the community, researchers may seek the input of community partners as they create their proposals and may work with community partners to develop plans to hire any necessary project staff from the community.

Development of intervention or data collection process. Research projects can look very different at this stage. Some researchers may be conducting ethnographic research and interviews. Others may be designing an intervention — a program or service designed to address a specific need — and testing it through a pilot program within a community. For others, this stage may include the development of a data collection instrument, such as a survey. Community engagement is valuable in each of these scenarios and can be incorporated in all of them. For example, community stakeholders could help tailor ESO programming or survey instruments so that they are culturally and linguistically

EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCHERS

A number of organizations have recently developed thoughtful guidance for researchers looking to gain competency in community-engaged research approaches. Researchers—and community organizations and funders—looking to deepen their thinking around the potential role of community engagement in their work can access Chicago Beyond's discussion of community-based research, "[Why Am I Always Being Researched?](#)" For researchers looking for concrete methods and approaches, the Urban Institute's [Community-Engaged Methods Guidebook](#) is an invaluable resource. Finally, researchers studying entrepreneurship and innovation who are hoping to engage in more partnered research approaches may be interested in upcoming Kauffman Foundation publications that share highlights and lessons learned from our own community-engaged research grantees.

appropriate for a diverse swath of entrepreneurs, more likely to resonate with the target groups, and able to capture more accurate insights. In some projects, community stakeholders and researchers may work together closely to jointly develop the intervention or data collection instrument. In other projects, community stakeholders may participate by advising on problems as they arise, or by promoting community participation by tapping into their own networks to recruit participants. Alternatively, researchers may reach out to community stakeholders after the intervention or data collection has been completed for a project retrospective, in which community feedback may suggest that researchers collect data in a different form or use a different methodology.

Data collection. In the data collection process, researchers gather the information necessary to address their research question(s) through participant observation, surveys, interviews, or focus groups, among other methodologies. Community-engaged researchers and community partners can collaborate during this phase in a number of ways, which can depend on the type of data the research requires. In studies that rely on complex statistical analysis, for example, specialized knowledge and training may be required. In this case, community-engagement could mean hiring skilled experts from within the community, or hiring and training community members to do less specialized work. In other projects, community members may be hired and trained to administer surveys, conduct interviews, or gather other data in their community.

Data analysis. Data analysis – the stage in which researchers interpret the data they collected – can benefit significantly from community involvement. Those closest to the issue and context addressed by the research question often have deeply nuanced insight into research findings that may not be obvious to researchers. There are myriad ways that researchers and community members can collaborate on data analysis. In some projects, researchers engage community perspectives and review in an iterative way, through methodologies such as **data walks** – a methodology that solicits community perspective on data as it is collected. In others, community members can be involved in reviewing and coding ethnographic data. Perhaps most importantly, researchers working with large-scale datasets may consult community members for their insight when the researchers are presented with data trends that run contrary to the research team’s assumptions.

Reporting and dissemination of results. In the final phase of research projects, researchers write about their results and seek avenues to disseminate them. Researchers’ goals at this stage – to publish their results in peer-reviewed journals – are sometimes incompatible with a community’s interest in learning about the main findings of a study quickly and having access to the data for their own use. To meet these competing needs, researchers and community partners can openly discuss data use, timeline, and ownership at the onset of projects to make certain that both parties’ needs are met. Compromises – such as framing public and academic write-ups of the research differently or ensuring that community partners can use the data right away while researchers can still successfully publish in academic spaces – ensure swift and impactful dissemination of research study results to both the community and academic spheres. Ideally, any data produced through a community-engaged research project should be jointly owned and elevated by the researchers and the community.

Beyond the knowledge produced by the research, community-engaged work should result in a tangible benefit to the community. It may be that dissemination of the results will drive policy change or program development to support community-identified needs. Or the research process or data ownership may build community capacity, enabling communities to develop and execute their own research agendas or to collect or use data that can increase their access to funding or political support.

A case study in the benefits of community-engaged research: Microfinance

The importance of community involvement in research on entrepreneurship and innovation can be seen in comparisons of the results of traditional research and community-based research on microfinance initiatives. The microfinance industry – comprised of both for-profit and non-profit institutions – seeks to address persistent global poverty by offering small loans with high-frequency repayment schemes to very low-income entrepreneurs, eliminating the requirement of a formal credit history for approval and therefore eliminating one of the barriers to entrepreneurship. Many microfinance institutions focus on loans to those living in extreme poverty and to women entrepreneurs. As a majority of this work is based in countries with pervasive gender inequality such as Bangladesh and India, micro-loans to women in these areas are seen as a means to both reduce poverty and increase women’s autonomy and economic mobility.

Traditional academic research on microfinance interventions indicates that they have been astoundingly successful. These studies find that borrowers repay loans to microfinance institutions at high rates — 96% on average.¹⁵ They also indicate that worldwide, more than 80% of microfinance borrowers are women, which many organizations celebrate as evidence of the interventions' influence on women's empowerment.¹⁶ And there is much support for the microfinance industry's positive impact on global poverty.¹⁷

A closer consideration of the local contexts and community narratives, however, raises questions about the effectiveness of this intervention and its impact. Community-engaged research studies suggest, in fact, that high levels of women's involvement in microfinance do not necessarily mean higher levels of women's empowerment. Community-engaged researchers working in the Amhara region of Ethiopia found, for example, that many women who access this type of credit do so under the direction of their husbands — who maintain control over financial decision-making and credit investments.¹⁸ In another study, researchers explored the experiences of Scheduled Caste women in Karnataka State, India, who were invited to participate in a microfinance program designed to support their transition to entrepreneurship. Through conversations with participants and their husbands, researchers found that men were “uneasy” about their wives' increased economic mobility and that women struggled to operate their businesses in a male-dominated market. Both of these factors contributed to the researchers' determination that the program was a failure as an economic independence intervention.¹⁹ More alarmingly, some community-engaged studies have found that there is a positive correlation between women's microfinance participation and domestic violence.²⁰

The contrast between the conclusions of the academic research on microfinance and those of community-engaged research powerfully illustrates the limitations of the academic model of conducting research and designing social interventions. The lack of community engagement in the design of microfinance programs and in the research to evaluate them led, at best, to misleading interpretations of data on programmatic success — and at worst, to deepening of gender-based violence.

Moreover, the traditional research model used in the evaluations of these programs inhibited researchers' ability to identify the context-specific improvements to the interventions that community-engaged researchers were able to suggest. These interventions, engaged researchers found, could be implemented alongside microcredit initiatives to improve their effectiveness and address the broader systemic conditions that hinder women's socioeconomic empowerment and mobility. Community-engaged work, then, both identified the shortcomings of research that fails to include the community and offered improvements to the interventions that would not have been clear without community engagement.

Benefits of community-engaged research

Scholars have argued — and research has documented — that engaging the community allows researchers to identify the most meaningful research questions and methods more successfully, achieve results that capture important and subtle distinctions more accurately, and frame and disseminate findings in ways that are more likely to benefit communities.²¹ A growing body of research has examined the positive impact of community involvement on research output and articulated the benefits of such work.²² We present a summary of these benefits below.

Stronger research findings. Collaborations between researchers and communities allow for improvements to the research agenda, the design of the research, the data collection and analysis, any interventions, and the interpretation of the results. During the research process, researchers and community members may identify previously unexplored issues or connections in their work, adding more nuance to the research findings and allowing researchers to more accurately contextualize the findings within the experiences of the community. As a result, researchers develop a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of the members of the communities they work alongside. And because the research is grounded in the lived experiences of community members, the findings are more robust, accurate, and insightful. Increased participant retention, for example, is one way engagement can create more robust research findings. *In a randomized controlled trial exploring substance abuse within an Indigenous community, a community-engaged research approach led to a 94% participant retention rate (in some fields of research, median retention rates are*

around 80%. A high retention rate is necessary for a full, holistic understanding of whether and how an intervention operates).²³ This retention rate is especially impressive given that Indigenous communities often resist participation in studies that are not Native-led because of extensive histories of research harm.²⁴ In this case, a community-engaged approach led to more accurate and robust data.

More salient, usable research. When communities are engaged directly in the research process, their input can influence decisions about the overall focus of the project. These contributions ensure that researchers are addressing the most salient issues in the community — which may not have been clear without community participation. As a result, findings may be more meaningful and more useful to community stakeholders themselves, in contrast to research that benefits scholars alone. Some research has found that community-engaged research is more likely to be acted upon by community stakeholders.²⁵

Higher ethical standard. Greater engagement with the community provides more opportunities to identify ethical issues within research projects, and it facilitates the creation of processes to resolve such issues when they arise. Community engagement in the planning and design of a research project can lead to improvements in the way that research is ultimately executed, making participation and/or safer for community members. And because community-engaged research values multiple ways of knowing and recognizes that everyone has expertise in their own lived experience, the relationships between researchers and the community can have a more even power dynamic. **When community-engaged research is done well, it can promote social justice, equity, and community empowerment through community, social, and policy change.** *In a collaborative study with Bronx youth, for example, researchers not only came to conclusions that were relevant to addressing youth health disparities, but also surfaced questions and best practices related to responsibly engaging youth in research and to determining the constitution of a community in youth-centered work.²⁶ These findings will benefit and improve other youth-centered engaged research projects.*

GROWING INTEREST IN COMMUNITY-ENGAGED METHODS

An increasing number of organizations and institutions are understanding the value of centering community voices in research and in program and policy design. Major funders, such as the National Institutes of Health, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the W.T. Grant Foundation have been instrumental in driving broader adoption of such community-engaged research approaches. Support and capacity-building for community engagement are growing in the professional and organizational development fields, as well. In 2016, the Design Justice Network was formed to spotlight and promote inclusion and representation in design projects. And in 2019, the Equitable Evaluation Initiative was formed with the goal of ensuring that evaluative work is equity-oriented. A key component of the Initiative's theory of change is the creation of evaluation research that is multiculturally valid and community-informed. Within academia, feminist theorists and scholars, in particular, continue to champion the practice of conducting research alongside — rather than on — communities.²⁷

Capacity- and advocacy-building within communities. In some cases, the knowledge and/or capacity of community members can be enhanced through their participation in a research project. Some researchers, for example, may train community members in research methods in order to include them in the research process. Community members can then use this new knowledge to develop and implement their own community-directed research projects. Similarly, community organizations collaborating on research projects often gain knowledge and/or capacity through their participation. And by taking ownership of the data, communities can also often leverage findings in their own search for grant funding or political support. Community-engaged research, then, promotes bidirectional capacity-building, empowering communities to engage in their own research endeavors.²⁸ *An experimental controlled trial in Santa Clara County, California, for example, involved training Vietnamese-American women community leaders and Vietnamese physicians to increase community awareness of and action in cervical cancer control. As a result of the study, pap test screenings increased substantially within the community, and the increased capacity of the community through its engagement suggests that the gains will persist in the long-term.²⁹ This example powerfully demonstrates the potential of community capacity-building in participatory research.*

Better data for community stakeholders. As a result of their participation in a research project, community members may have access to a set of data they can cite in applications for grants and other funding to position themselves more competitively. Some models of community-engaged research have been shown to increase the capacity and credibility of community-based organizations to effect local change. In one community-engaged research collaboration exploring environmental justice in North Carolina, for

example, a memorandum of understanding that ensured community ownership of data led to, and sustained, an ongoing relationship and program that addressed water sanitation – a tangible community change.³⁰

Broader dissemination of results. Community insights into the relevance and implications of a research project result in more effective framing of the results and more opportunities to disseminate the findings. Community engagement allows the research to reach a broader audience, amplifying the findings of the research. For example, *researchers using a community-engaged approach engaged African Americans who were both homeless and living with mental illness in a study exploring the potential usefulness of a peer navigator program. Researchers engaged individuals not only to better understand community needs and to better refine the peer navigator program, but also to introduce the initiative to the community and create participant trust and buy-in. These efforts resulted in improved program adoption rates.*³¹

Greater research impact. Because the communities that are affected by the research findings and recommendations are directly involved at various stages of the process, it is thought that change is often easier to effect through community-engaged research than through more traditional research methodologies. **The centering of community voices and community needs throughout the research process often leads to projects that influence policy change or program development and create a tangible benefit to the community.** Together, community involvement in the research and researchers' enhanced understanding of the community's experiences, challenges, and opportunities can lead to improvements in the way research findings are framed and subsequently used to bring about change. Community members' amplification of the findings of the research also allows the findings to have a greater influence on policy change and program development that supports the needs of the community.³²

Opportunities to support greater adoption of community-engaged research

Despite the benefits of these community-engaged research models, barriers to their widespread adoption remain. Researchers, the methodologies they use, and the products they create are shaped by the structural conditions in which they work. However, institutes of higher education, research funders, and academic publishers are all positioned to change the way research is conducted and shared. We consider some of these barriers and opportunities below.

Rebuild trust between universities and marginalized communities. The painful history of research work in marginalized communities can make building trust with these communities today particularly difficult. In many cases, there is a long-standing tension between universities and the communities in which they are located, and the lack of strong relationships between universities and community members make it difficult for researchers to begin to build connections. Furthermore, at a structural level, universities were not designed to facilitate knowledge transfer between academics and communities. With the exception of extension offices or other institutes that were created to disseminate practical knowledge outside the university, most institutions' primary interest in the community is engaging potential students from the community. [Campus Compact](#), an organization committed to advancing higher education community engagement, offers some helpful models and programs for institutional leaders to consider as first steps to remedying this historical harm.

Standards for publications and research conferences. Academic journals and conferences – the primary outlets that researchers are incentivized to use to share research findings – discourage community engagement in the research process. Most top-tier journals, across fields, privilege “standard” models of research as opposed to community-engaged frameworks, making it difficult for a scholar using these methodologies to publish their work in a high-impact outlet. Moreover, some journals do not publish articles if the findings have been previously publicized, and the lengthy journal publication process means that community members often have to wait for a long period after a study has concluded to learn about the main findings, access the data for their own use, or discuss the key findings in the local press or at a community event in which other community members can ask questions about the results. In addition to discouraging academic work that uses community-engaged methods, academic journals and conferences inhibit community members' ability to learn about the results of the research directly. Both are costly to access or attend, and they are often exclusive in language and conversation. Journal and academic manuscript editors might consider interrogating existing practices, and broadening reviewer pools to include reviewers with a wide range of methodological – including community-engaged – background and expertise. Editors might also reconsider prohibitions on publishing previously printed work, if that work was presented at community forums (i.e., local newspapers or community-level publications).

Reshape academic incentives. For most researchers, publication of work that contributes to academic discussion in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals is necessary to advance their careers. They face significant pressure to publish their core research in these journals,

especially in the early years of their academic careers, and the journals' standards for publication described above discourage them from pursuing community-engaged work. Furthermore, work within communities and efforts to share research with a community are not typically seen as rigorous scholarly activities, and they are rarely included in tenure and promotion guidelines at most institutions. As this type of work is not rewarded by academic institutions, journals, or conferences, the researchers – who are often also responsible for course development, teaching, and departmental and committee work at their institutions – may be reluctant to explore these new methodologies. Department chairs and others in positions of power in institutes of higher education might consider recognizing community-level impact in tenure and promotion review. [Campus Compact](#), again, offers guidance for institutional change-makers looking to support this work. They also highlight exemplar universities who are leading this work – including [Kansas State University](#), who revised their tenure and promotion guidelines to incentivize public engagement and impact.

Increased training in these methodologies. While a number of disciplines – such as anthropology, public health, and others – have incorporated more work with communities and have developed frameworks for community-engaged research, most fields and disciplines do not offer training in community-engaged research. Researchers, therefore, may struggle to build competence in this way of approaching knowledge creation. [Chicago Beyond's guidebook](#) offers guidance for researchers interested in gaining competency in this approach to knowledge creation. Additionally, the [Urban Institute's Community Engaged Methods Guidebook](#) is a good place for researchers to begin to familiarize themselves with engaged approaches.

Shift funding models. Prevailing models of research funding also create conditions unconducive to community-engaged research. Many foundations, for example, define the value of research narrowly, seeing it primarily in terms of its contribution to the academic literature rather than its contribution to the relevant community. In addition, short application deadlines leave little time for researchers and community partners to collaborate on applications or build relationships. And funding caps on interview incentives and rules against funds for research assistants who are not part of the university limit community involvement and discourage the training and hiring of community research partners. While a growing number of research funders – including the Kauffman Foundation – are now working to learn from and better support community-engaged researchers, grant structures that support this work are largely concentrated in a few research fields or focus areas, and even in those few areas, community engagement is not the norm. Some specific suggestions for funders interested in bolstering their support for engaged researchers are included below.

Community-engaged research on entrepreneurship

The growing interest in community-engaged methods across other fields and disciplines has been slower to gain ground in studies of entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic growth. This approach, however, has a great deal of potential to accelerate the research-to-practice process by creating shared space for deeper conversations between communities and researchers about entrepreneurship, innovation, and support for community economic growth. By centering entrepreneurs and their communities in the research and involving them throughout the knowledge creation process, this work can more quickly put research in the hands of those who need it compared with the traditional academic publishing process.

Community-engaged approaches and the more applicable and usable entrepreneurship research they can facilitate could deeply enrich our understanding of these issues, allowing us to better support inclusive entrepreneur-focused economic development. The following examples represent only a few of the many areas of research in entrepreneurship and innovation that may benefit from this type of work:

- **Systemically marginalized entrepreneurs.** Community-engaged work in this area could allow researchers to develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing systemically marginalized entrepreneurs, and could guide the development of policies and programs that are more responsive to entrepreneurs' and communities' needs.
- **Entrepreneur self-identification.** Researchers across fields know relatively little about the ways that entrepreneurs self-identify – particularly about those who may be engaging in entrepreneurial activity in systemically marginalized communities. Some entrepreneurship may be reported as “side gigs,” for example, or may not be reported if individuals do not think they fit the entrepreneurial mold. Entrepreneurs who are not high-growth tech firm founders, for example, may not see themselves as entrepreneurs. Community-engaged research offers a means to gain a deeper, more holistic understanding of individuals' self-identification.
- **Bias and discrimination in entrepreneurship.** Community-engaged approaches could be particularly valuable in areas of entrepreneurship research exploring bias or discrimination. Extant research shows high rates – across fields – of social desirability bias in research exploring racism and other topics that are often considered taboo,

meaning that interviewees or survey respondents adjust their answers to make their ideologies appear more in line with acceptable behavior.³³ Increased trust and transparency between researchers and communities of study could illuminate more clearly how bias and discrimination (in access to knowledge, capital, and support) impact disparate entrepreneurship outcomes.

- **Choice and the labor market.** Research is still working toward a better understanding of the factors that shape individual “choice” to participate in the labor market. Deep engagement with individuals navigating these questions might better illuminate the process of entrepreneurial starts compared with more distanced research mechanisms (such as surveys).

Looking forward

Research on entrepreneurship has extensively documented the challenges and barriers that systemically marginalized entrepreneurs face – yet this work has not led to the social change we had hoped to achieve. It is imperative that we go beyond efforts that focus solely on creating new knowledge, and move toward efforts that engage communities alongside us in considering research relevance and usability. Community-engaged research offers us an opportunity to gain a deeper, more actionable understanding of the unique contexts and systemic barriers to success facing systemically marginalized entrepreneurs, and to identify interventions that could support more equitable and inclusive structures for entrepreneurship.

At the Kauffman Foundation, our initial cohort of grantees conducting community-engaged research on entrepreneurship has already taught us a great deal about this type of work and its benefits (including, for example, how supporting multi-project research collaborations between communities and research partners can lead to deeper community-level impact than funding one-off collaborations). And in addition to continuing to seek out more community-engaged researchers for our funding in the coming years, we are considering the following changes to our funding process to reduce the barriers to the growth of this type of work:

- **Ask applicants to articulate the potential value of future research findings for relevant communities and policy stakeholders.**
- **Launch Requests for Proposals (RFPs) with longer application deadlines so that researchers and community partners can connect and apply together.**
- **Fund relationship-building time so that researchers and community leaders can identify pressing areas of research together.**
- **Enable grantees to determine amounts for interview incentives, with no limits or caps.**
- **Allow projects to be staffed by research assistants who are not employed by the university or the institution receiving funding.**

We are hopeful that our investment in this approach and the changes we are making to our funding process will inspire more researchers to more purposefully engage with and learn from the communities they hope to serve in their work. We are looking forward to learning more – alongside communities, researchers, policy stakeholders, and other funders – and sharing our evolving understanding of this work as we go.

Grantee profiles

Grantee profiles

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative, Inc. (BCC) and Hunter College, CUNY

Sigmund Shipp, Laura Wolf-Powers, and Gretchen Susi

Black businesses are underrepresented in contracting opportunities despite the growth of supplier diversity programs that link Black businesses to institutional purchasing departments. To respond to this challenge, the Brooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC) – a coalition of Brooklyn safety net hospitals, community organizations, labor unions, and public universities – founded the Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub (The Hub) to localize and redirect the supply chain of goods and services to Black entrepreneurs who seek hospital contracts.

With funding from the Kauffman Foundation, BCC has partnered with Hunter College to conduct a participatory action research (PAR) project that will expand understanding of Black businesses in Brooklyn and enhance local supplier diversity programs. Begun in summer 2022, the PAR involved interviewing Black entrepreneurs, intermediaries that assist Black businesses, and Black business students who aspire to be entrepreneurs. The interviews will culminate in a report that presents an analysis of the research data, makes recommendations for The Hub, and will guide the design of activities in the second and third years of the project.

Over years two and three, five entrepreneurs will be identified and provided with support to secure supplier contracts with anchor institutions. Two guidebooks will be created, based largely on the PAR findings. One of these books will be a guide for entrepreneurs doing business with anchor institutions, and the other will be for anchor institutions, highlighting best practices for small business engagement. Guidebooks will be distributed widely, both locally and nationally. In addition, roundtables and workshops will be convened for elected officials, community boards, and healthcare anchor institutions to enhance project visibility and present PAR findings. Scholarly publications will also be completed.



1. TWO MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM ON BELMONT AVENUE IN BROWNSVILLE. 2. A MURAL ON PITKIN AVENUE IN BROWNSVILLE. 3. TAKEN ON TOMPKINS AVE IN BEDFORD -STUYVESANT, WHERE THERE IS A STRONG GROUP OF BLACK-WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES.

University of Michigan and Jefferson East, Inc.

Kristin S. Seefeldt, Tawanna Dillahunt, Julie Hui, Christie Baer, Aaron W. Jackson, and Lutalo Sanifu

Disparities in access to and use of technology can exacerbate inequalities in entrepreneurial outcomes, particularly among lower-income and older entrepreneurs. This divide means that these entrepreneurs may not adopt business technologies that can help improve efficiency and boost productivity even when they are easy to implement, which limits the entrepreneurs' overall success. To address this problem, researchers at the University of Michigan developed a partnership with leaders at Jefferson East, Inc. to pilot the Community Tech Worker program. Using an asset-based, community-based participatory research approach, this research tests the applicability of the community health worker model in the realm of entrepreneurial and community digital support.

At the onset of the project, researchers attended community meetings and conducted exploratory interviews to gather insights regarding the type of technological assistance needed by entrepreneurs. The team then recruited community members and students in southeast Michigan and trained them to both assess and address the digital needs of local small business owners. The information that was gathered through the initial research then informed the onboarding program for the tech workers that were recruited. The expectation is that this training as a community tech worker and the experience that comes with the position will also provide the workers with pathways into skilled technology jobs. Community tech workers consult with researchers and Jefferson East staff to surface the scope and complexity of issues that entrepreneurs in the region are facing in their technology needs. These entrepreneur experiences and feedback will be collected and used throughout the program to refine it as it progresses and inform ongoing research on digital engagement in entrepreneurship.



1. COMMUNITY TECH WORKERS PRESENT AT THE DETROIT DIGITAL INCLUSION WEEK. **2.** COMMUNITY TECH WORKERS WORK WITH CLIENTS AT THE JEFFERSON EAST NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE HUB. **3.** COMMUNITY TECH WORKERS SIGN UP CLIENTS AT THE DETROIT DIGITAL INCLUSION WEEK.

Virginia Commonwealth University and RVA Works

Elsie Harper-Anderson and Dale Fickett

This project seeks to better understand the disparate experiences of Black, white, and Latinx entrepreneurs in the Richmond, Virginia, community. It explores the intersection of race, ecosystems, social networks, and other variables and the ways in which these factors shape an entrepreneur's success. The research will involve collecting weekly diaries and conducting interviews with 40 entrepreneurs (20 Black, 15 white, and 5 Latinx) to track their daily experiences as entrepreneurs and identify their challenges and barriers to success. Participant entrepreneurs receive monthly stipends for engaging in the research. At six-month intervals, the data collected and key findings will be shared with entrepreneurs. They will be invited to share their perspectives on the emerging themes and to help develop questions for other key stakeholders in the ecosystem. This entrepreneur-focused data collection will be paired with data from interviews and focus groups with other ecosystem stakeholders. These interviews will be conducted with 20 to 25 leaders in Richmond's entrepreneurial ecosystem and will focus on equity-related barriers to entrepreneurial success.

The research team is partnering with RVA Works and other local ESOs. At the completion of the data collection period, the research team will host a community-wide forum for all stakeholders, participants, and policymakers, which will provide a platform to discuss the study results and involve participants in outlining an action plan. The research project will culminate in an ecosystem equity action plan that can be used by ecosystem leaders and policymakers to create change and promote equity in access to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial success in Richmond.

University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) Center for Neighborhoods

Dina Newman, Michael Frisch, Jacob A. Wagner, and Erin Royals

Grantees at University of Missouri-Kansas City's Center for Neighborhoods seek to understand the role of place-based challenges and the ways they compound the challenges that Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs face, such as limited access to capital, historical trauma, or wealth inequality. The issues related to the business location are complex. From home-based businesses and co-working spaces to the brick-and-mortar shop, entrepreneurs' locational advantages and disadvantages impact their success in terms of financing, business operations, security, customer perceptions of safety, bank and lender perception of the business, and the longevity of the venture. Neighborhood and community relationships are important to Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs, but the results of these interactions with neighbors can be mixed.

The project methodology includes asset walks (a participatory research methodology developed by the project team) in local neighborhoods and commercial districts to better understand conditions on the ground and to observe locational advantages and disadvantages in situ. The team has hosted "neighborhood business nights" to foster interaction between neighbors and entrepreneurs. These activities – in addition to interviews, focus groups, and other traditional research methods – will help to build a new body of knowledge that will inform future activities. Community partners, entrepreneurs, and neighborhood advocates will participate in the development of research as well as programs and other activities to further the work.

Using the insights gained from the research process, the team will design and implement new programs, workshops, or trainings to build the capacity of neighborhood leaders and organizations to better support local entrepreneurs in their communities, and vice versa.



PHOTOS FROM ASSET WALKS AND PHOTOS FROM NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS NIGHT CONVERSATIONS.

University of California at San Diego and United Taxi Workers of San Diego

Mikaail Hussein, Lilly Irani, Udayan Tandon, Aisha Warsame, and Peter Zchiesche

United Taxi Workers San Diego (UTWSD) is a multi-ethnic taxi driver association led by Black immigrant workers. The organization has been working with software developers and public sector partners to integrate taxis as a solution to strengthen public transit in the city. UTWSD represents a unique opportunity to offer insights into how the gig economy can be utilized in worker-owned, community-strengthening ways, and how ecosystem stakeholders can better support this work. This community-based participatory ethnographic research will document UTWSD's efforts to develop their software and develop recommendations for how other communities can implement similar community-driven innovation initiatives.

The research team has trained a community researcher in community-based participatory research methods. She has joined the team as a research lead. The team also intends to create a Community Advisory Board and Policy Advisory Board, which will help guide the research and identify opportunities for impact. Finally, the team plans to host a number of stakeholder engagement activities, including focus groups and interviews with taxi workers. The work will be continually reviewed and refined by the advisory board as well as by UTWSD members themselves.



KAUFFMAN-FUNDED RESEARCHERS UDAYAN TANDON (UCSD) AND MIKAIL HUSSEIN (UNITED TAXI WORKERS SAN DIEGO) FACILITATE A DISCUSSION AMONG TAXI COOPERATIVE LEADERS OF MARKET OPPORTUNITIES.



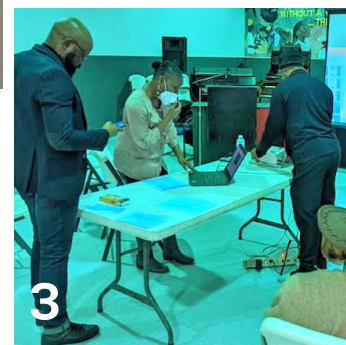
KAUFFMAN-FUNDED RESEARCHERS UDAYAN TANDON (UCSD) AND AISHA WARSAME (UNITED TAXI WORKERS SAN DIEGO) WORK WITH WILL JOHNSON (UTWSD) TO TEST DIGITAL RIDE DISPATCH SOFTWARE DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH A SOFTWARE COMPANY.

McNair Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth

Alisha Small, Jennifer Rabb, and Deloyd T. Parker, Jr.

In Houston, both the Second and Third Wards have been gentrifying, and researchers are seeking to explore the experiences of incumbent small businesses in these communities that have historically been Hispanic and African American. At the end of the project, an interactive map will be produced, illustrating the economic changes experienced in both wards. The map will include changes in the presence of incumbent businesses and economic success rates, among other data. Policymakers can use these data to better understand the economic impact that gentrification has had on incumbent businesses in each ward.

Project leads intend to collaborate with SHAPE Community Center, community research assistants, and other community stakeholders to produce quantitative and qualitative community-led research. As part of this process, they will host engagement events throughout the research period to share and validate research results with community members. Additionally, the team will invite community members to share their experiences and knowledge about the past and present entrepreneurial landscapes in each ward. This insight will be used to inform the development of the community maps and business directories. At the end of the project, the community directory of businesses will be passed on to community stakeholders to own and update as needed.



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Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Research

Methodologies to advance equity and inclusion



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