

A photograph of a large, multi-story brick building with a central tower and a flag on top, viewed through an ornate, dark iron gate. The building is illuminated from within, and the scene is set against a backdrop of trees and a cloudy sky.

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**Refining LIS Curriculum:
Engaging Communities through Resilient
Relationships**

ALISE 2021

September 20-24, 2021

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- Public libraries are well-positioned to play a leading role in helping individuals and communities adapt in rapidly changing environments (Jones, 2020).
- Enhanced community engagement can help public libraries during times of crisis like COVID, budget cuts, and increased social justice advocacy (i.e., BLM).
- Appropriately applying community-based participatory research (CBPR) may allow libraries to remain connected to their communities through societal change.



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CBPR: Reaching the Community Where They Are

- CBPR is an approach to conducting research which is predicated on creating reciprocal relationships between academic researchers and community partners.
- CBPR principles can be applied to public library efforts.
- Therefore, training in CBPR should be incorporated into LIS programs.



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Key Principles of CBPR in a Public Library Setting

1. Seek to understand the existing resources within the library community.
2. Establish reciprocal relationships at the very inception of the potential research idea and nurture them through dissemination of findings or potential programs.
3. Begin with the view that research findings or potential programs will have mutual benefit.
4. Empower both librarians and community members while being cognizant of the inequalities inherent in most community-research partnerships.
5. Be aware of strength-based approaches to communities and individuals.
6. Disseminate findings and insights to all relevant parties.

CBPR and Action Research VS Community Engagement

<p>CBPR (Israel et al., 2020; Unertl et al., 2016; Wallerstein et al., 2017)</p>	<p>Community Engagement (American Library Association, 2017; Coward et al., 2018; Sung et al., 2013)</p>
<p>CBPR is about research which, in turn, is about creating new knowledge which can inform practice. It involves research questions, data collection, analysis, and results dissemination.</p>	<p>Librarians leave the building to conduct outreach. By going into the community, librarians see what needs there are and become more responsive to the people they serve.</p>
<p>CBPR is a collaborative initiative between researchers (professors and/or graduate students) and community members. It engages university faculty, students and staff with diverse community partners and community members at the inception of the research process.</p>	<p>Generally, community engagement is an initiative between libraries and librarians with the community in which they serve. It involves decision making which provides opportunities for communities to contribute to improved decision making and potential programs.</p>
<p>CBPR creates and nurtures reciprocal relationships that transcend specific initiatives and projects.</p>	<p>Community engagement focuses on relationship development to build new relationships or improve existing relationships with the community.</p>

- MI, MLIS, and doctoral graduates need to learn how to engage and assess their communities to address gaps and fill them with information resources and programs.
- An elective course that focuses on community engagement, which delves into applied, action research, and CBPR, can offer students the tools they need to incorporate CBPR at their current/future libraries.



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Potential Challenges to Implementing a CBPR Approach

- Projects can be led by those who exert their power as defined by access to resources or status in the institution (Wallerstein, 2017).
- Project leaders can be intolerant to input from community partners. These leaders tend to disregard what the community may have to offer.
- Racial bias and stereotypes can influence research activities as research is not protected from larger societal dynamics (Cooke, 2019; Hathcock, 2015).
- Researchers hold conscious or subconscious perceptions that marginalized communities are viewed as in need of eternal “help.”
- Researchers and library leaders may view marginalized communities as the cultural “other.”
- There are often disconnects on timelines for equitable incentives which are a persistent issue in community-academic partnerships (Senteio et al., 2021).

Senteio et al. (2021) offers some guidance for researchers who lead CBPR projects and efforts:

1. Look beyond the numbers to focus on individuals' stories.
2. Be willing to engage with community members throughout the effort.
3. Be transparent about what you do and do not know.
4. Consider that collaborative partners are working in communities where they grew up, or where they may have raised their own families.
5. Personality matters.



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- Rutgers University and the East Brunswick (NJ) Public Library (EBPL) has assessed community needs and developed strategies to support this community through engagement.
- In 2019, the EBPL and Rutgers partnered to make the EBPL a field placement site for the Rutgers Masters of Social Work (MSW) Program. A third MSW student is being selected for Fall 2021.
- The EBPL is currently the site of a CBPR project, focusing on wellness which is being led by the authors, a Rutgers MSW intern, and a community leader.
 - This project aims to create meaningful programming for older adults of the EBPL community in a time of isolation in which they may be experiencing a greater need for social support.



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