

Partnering with organisations beyond academia through strategic collaboration for research and mobilisation in immigrant/ethnic-minority communities

Tanvir Chowdhury Turin,^{1,2,3,4} Nashit Chowdhury,^{1,2} Nahid Rumana,⁵ Mohammad A A Lasker,⁶ Mahdi Qasqas⁷

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ABSTRACT

Community-engaged research needs involving community organisations as partners in research. Often, however, considerations regarding developing a meaningful partnership with community organisations are not highlighted. Researchers need to identify the most appropriate organisation with which to engage and their capacity to be involved. Researchers tend to involve organisations based on their connection to potential participants, which relationship often ends after achieving this objective. Further, the partner organisation may not have the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the research process. As such, it is the researchers' responsibility to build capacity within their partner organisations to encourage more sustainable and meaningful community-engaged research. Organisations pertinent to immigrant/ethnic-minority communities fall into three sectors: public, private and non-profit. While public and private sectors play an important role in addressing issues among immigrant/ethnic-minority communities, their contribution as research partners may be limited. Involving the non-profit sector, which tends to be more accessible and utilitarian and includes both grassroots associations (GAs) and immigrant service providing organisations (ISPOs), is more likely to result in mutually beneficial research partnerships and enhanced community engagement. GAs tend to be deeply rooted within, and thus are often truly representative of, the community. As they may not fully understand their importance from a researcher's perspective, nor have time for research, capacity-building activities are required to address these limitations. Additionally, ISPOs may have a different understanding of research and research priorities. Understanding the difference in perspectives and needs of these organisations, building trust and creating capacity building opportunities are important steps for researchers to consider towards building durable partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

People-centred research employs community-engaged approaches such as

SUMMARY BOX

- ⇒ Partnering with organisations should comprise more than tokenism. They need to be involved in the entire research process.
- ⇒ Organisations contributing to immigrant/rethnic-minority communities generally belong to one of these sectors: public, private and non-profit.
- ⇒ Different types of organisations have different level of community connectivity.
- ⇒ Community and service provider organisations from the non-profit sector are generally more approachable and require appropriate involvement approaches, such as collective research priorities, building trust and more.
- ⇒ Organisations from each sector have their own strengths and limitations, and researchers need to acknowledge those and plan their approach for partnership keeping that in mind.
- ⇒ The approach and nature of partnering with community organisations in research needs to be customised based on their individualities.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)¹ or Integrated Knowledge Translation (IKT),² where different levels of the community are involved in research. These collaborative approaches should be built on equitably involving community partners in all aspects of the research process and enabling them to contribute their expertise and share responsibilities and achievements.^{3 4} Guided by these approaches, community-engaged research can play a crucial role in improving unmet needs⁵ and barriers⁶ to the optimal health and wellness of immigrant/ethnic-minority populations through exploring the issues, identifying their root causes and configuring potential solutions.

Understanding a community's ecosystem is an important initial step for any



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For numbered affiliations see end of article.

Correspondence to

Dr Tanvir Chowdhury Turin; turin.chowdhury@ucalgary.ca

community-based research programme and is fundamental in guiding the community engagement process.⁴ A community ecosystem comprises community members, different organisations working in the community, funders and policymakers dealing with problems or solutions in the community. The concept of community also varies and can be interpreted differently, for example, by geographic area, faith, profession and so on. For our research programme, we define a community as a group of people with shared characteristics largely related to culture, religion, country of origin and immigration status. Understanding the ecosystem includes identifying and engaging community champions and influencers, partnering with organisations active in the community and being sensitive to the dynamics of community subgroups. Emerging evidence that meaningful knowledge-user engagement is a major predictor of research utilisation has increased interest in researcher/knowledge user collaboration.⁷

Different levels of organisations working in the community are crucial knowledge users who need to be involved in co-producing knowledge so that research is more relevant, appropriate, responsive, acceptable and effective in promoting meaningful and sustainable change. Involving community organisations in research brings a community perspective and practicality to the research, which includes identifying and prioritising issues the community encounters and designing innovative solutions that are feasible and acceptable to the community.⁸ To develop a community-based research programme, we sought meaningful collaboration with potential knowledge users to guide us on relevant research questions, help with knowledge mobilisation initiatives and support our community engagement activities.

As part of our community-engaged research programme on immigrant/ethnic-minority community issues, we conducted a range of studies on health and wellness issues as well as integration and resettlement, including studies on equitable access to health care⁹⁻¹² and labour market integration for internationally trained health professionals.^{13 14} We conducted studies where we explored the challenges and unmet needs faced by Bangladeshi-Canadians when accessing healthcare.^{9 10} Through our community conversations, we also explored probable solutions proposed by the community about the barriers they face.¹¹ As our programme of research progressed, we strived to obtain guidance from the community, who contributed to shaping our research policy through issue prioritisation.¹² During these studies, we engaged with various community groups and organisations and recognised different perspectives, expectations, benefits and limitations across the organisations. We strategised for meaningful and active involvement of the organisations working in immigrant/ethnic-minority communities in conducting research, priority setting, co-creating knowledge products and knowledge translation or mobilisation activities.⁴ Engagement was embedded within a participatory approach and

entailed ongoing relationships between the researchers and organisations, where the community's benefit was at the core.

TYPOLOGY OF ORGANISATIONS

The ecosystem surrounding immigrant/ethnic-minority communities in Canada involves three main sectors: public, private and non-profit. The experiences we gained while developing our research programme related to visible minorities helped shape our understanding of the dynamics and nuances of the different types of community organisations. **Figure 1** shows a basic typology of organisations active in the immigrant/ethnic-minority communities with whom we have been working. In this article, we reflect on our experience of developing collaborations with different organisations, particularly in the non-profit sector.

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

We initially reached out to a number of organisations in the public sector who focus on immigrant and refugee health and wellness issues. These organisations included health service agencies, municipal-level local government networks and departments and provincial government social welfare branches. During this outreach process, we realised that public sector organisations lack strong and direct community connections. The nature of their involvement with grassroots communities tends to be more temporary and funding-based, rather than on building a working and lasting relationship with communities. This is indicated by a lack of follow-up, inconsistent communication with communities, and not actively including communities in the decision-making process.

As our community-engaged research programme has grown, our partnership with several of these organisations has developed into a policymaker/knowledge-user/researcher collaboration. We received guidance from them about their research needs and where we could contribute through our capacity and expertise. This also helped us propose research projects where they willingly contributed their expertise because the research questions fit their mandates. We believe community-engaged researchers are well positioned to continue to play a critical role in bridging the gap between the public sector and grassroots communities.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In engaging the private sector in our research, we identified two categories of businesses based on their principal focus: businesses that predominantly focus on visible minority communities as their primary clientele (including ethnic groceries, ethnic restaurants or different types of businesses within the localities where visible minorities are dominant residents) and large corporations (such as banks, insurance companies, telecommunications and so on), whose principal focus is

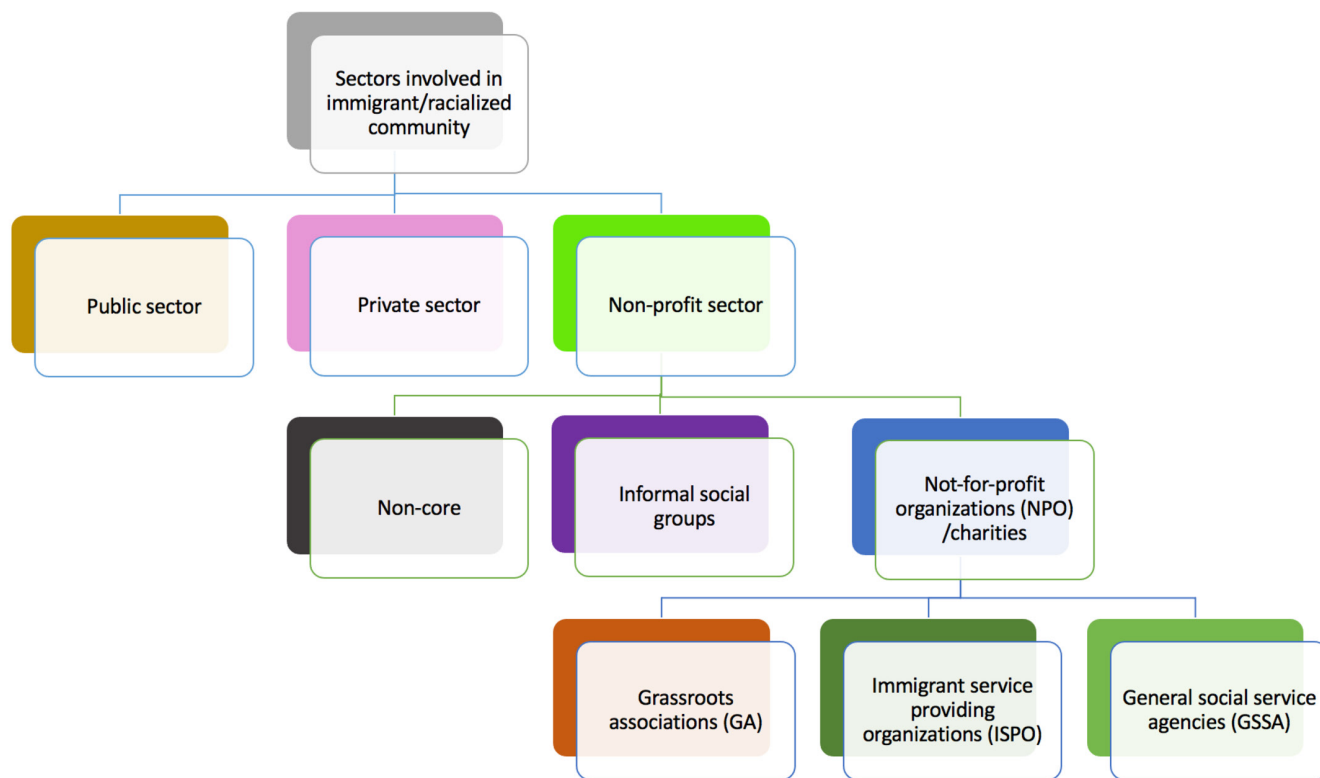


Figure 1 Typology of the organisations generally active in the immigrant/ethnic-minority communities.

providing a general need to the overall community but who target ethnic minority communities to enhance their client base. Furthermore, their social commitment aims to contribute towards the development of ethnic minority communities as part of their overall community development initiatives.

Immigrant-focused businesses were a good venue for us to undertake our community outreach and dissemination efforts because of direct access to decision-makers and their position within the community, which allowed us to mobilise our efforts quickly and seamlessly. When we interacted with these organisations and explained our intentions, they were generous in letting us place posters, leaflets and survey materials in their venues. Mainstream corporations contribute indirectly to the community through funding the non-profit sector. They often have projects and funds specifically allocated for community development and research (eg, Scotiabank-Mitacs Economic Resilience Research Fund¹⁵). Aligning the contributions from the private sector with the needs of the community and academic research objectives is promising for community-engaged research.

Apart from these two groups of private-sector organisations, there are other organisations who tend to employ newly arrived immigrant/ethnic-minority people more commonly, such as meat packing plants, fast food restaurants, transport, maintenance and so on. It is likely that these employers do not seek much experience and have high turnover of staff; therefore, newly arrived immigrant/ethnic-minority people commonly use them as a starting job. In addition, there are some private sector

groups who hire foreign workers in Canada. Examples include agriculture and caregiver organisations, who usually hire foreign workers on work permit who often become immigrants as their length of stay in Canada progresses. In our experience, these organisations do not have community-level interaction or influence. Their health and wellness activities are more workplace focused and occupational issues related. Despite these characteristics, there is potential that these organisations can be partnered with in innovative ways to improve community health.

UNDERSTANDING THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

The non-profit sector touches on virtually all aspects of community life in Alberta. Several terms have been used interchangeably in the extant literature to describe the non-profit sector, including independent sector, third sector, charitable sector, tax-exempt sector, civil society, social enterprise, voluntary sector or non-governmental organisations.^{16 17} There is an additional term in Canada—the core non-profit sector—for charities and other non-profit organisations (not including hospitals and universities).¹⁸ During our engagement process, we identified two types of active entities in the community level: informal social groups and not-for-profit organisations (NPOs).

Informal social groups

Informal social groups are formed organically in a community when individuals of similar interest or

background interact with each other. For instance, we found many such groups within the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Calgary, some of which were formed with a group of community members around a particular interest, such as a group interested in playing cricket/badminton or in religious discussion/practice or cultural groups for plays/theatres or singing. These groups do not have formal registration as organisations, rather they are formed by individuals to satisfy their social needs of affiliation.

Social network theory emphasises how social relationships drive and influence behavioural change and use of scarce resources, build trust among members and hold important social capital.^{19 20} While they do not have structured organisational governance, they have a high level of interaction within the community and have solidarity and the trust of community members, which makes them important allies for impactful community-engaged research.²¹

Not-for-profit organisations

NPOs in Canada are defined as tax-exempt registered organisations, such as an association, club or society, that operate for social welfare, recreation or pleasure, civic improvement or any other purpose aside from generating a profit for its owners.^{22 23} NPOs in Alberta are registered across the following subgroups based on the types of activities on which they focus: Culture and Recreation, Social Services, Religion and Others. These groups are aggregations of the 12 classifications in the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations.^{22 23} There are a number of established taxonomy frameworks that classify NPOs into different subgroups. During our initial exploration of those organisations active in the Bangladeshi-Canadian community, we observed some interesting nuances across these organisations. When we interacted with the NPOs to collaborate on community-engaged research, our understanding of some field-level factors led us to classify them as grassroots associations (GAs), immigrant service providing organisations (ISPOs) and general social services agencies (GSSAs).

Grassroots associations

GAs are entirely created and run by community members, and their work predominantly is community-focused. They do not depend entirely on grant funding for their existence. Crowdsourcing or community drives for funds are their main income sources, which is predominantly used for their activities rather than administrative salaries. They also tend to be membership-based. In our experience, for taking research to the grassroots level, GAs have the largest reach. However, a more personalised engagement approach is needed that focuses on trustful relationship building. This can be achieved through being available for the community with genuineness, following through on commitments, and being transparent and accountable. This needs to be undertaken through continuous community engagement, rather than taking

a parachute in and out approach.⁴ GAs generally are not familiar with the concepts of partnered research and thus may not feel engaged by a conventional invitation for research partnership without having been involved in prior relationship-building efforts.

Immigrant service providing organisations

ISPOs are funded by different levels of government to work across immigrant/ethnic-minority communities in a given locality. Their work focuses on providing service to people in need, including the Bangladeshi-Canadian community. These organisations are important allies while conducting research or knowledge mobilisation with subgroups of community members who need services, particularly as the services these organisations provide are predominantly accessed by the people who require them.

General social services agencies

GSSAs include organisations that provide various social services to the community within which they operate. They provide services, including, but not limited to, child and women welfare; helping people struggling with addiction, mental health or domestic abuse; serving people who are affected by food insecurity; labour market integration and so on. Further, GSSAs are funded by different government levels or private donations and their work focuses on the overall community, not only immigrant/ethnic-minority communities. Many members of immigrant/ethnic-minority communities benefit from accessing services offered by GSSAs. In our experience, involving GSSAs in immigrant/ethnic-minority grassroots community level research may not be directly advantageous, but they can play a major role in knowledge translation activities and the scale-up efforts of the research programme, thus helping with impact creation. Thus, developing collaboration with GSSAs is very important for any community-engaged programme of research.

WORKING TOWARDS RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

Our outreach efforts involved engaging different organisations active in the community in our research programme. Following traditional community-based research approaches (CBPR¹ or IKT²), we requested their involvement and input in our research activities at different levels. CBPR and IKT promote the idea of involving potential knowledge users from the onset across all the aspects of research process. Thus, we not only asked them to assist with the data collection, we also initiated discussion with them to help polish the research question, plan the data collection and analysis and interpretation, and knowledge creation and translation. We also presented the opportunity to co-publish our manuscript with organisation members who wanted to be more involved in the research process as a community scholar and citizen researcher.²⁴ We sought to develop and maintain an equitable and empowered partnership—one

that recognises and respects each partner, yet clearly distinguishes roles—to minimise false expectations and potential conflicts. Given the nature of our research programme, we have placed a strong emphasis on partnership building with GAs and ISPOs, as we found them to be the most connected with the immigrant/ethnic-minority community.

Outreach to GAs for buy-in

We started reaching out to the Bangladeshi-Canadian community's grassroots organisations to get their buy-in for our research programme. For example, within the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Calgary, there are sociocultural groups based on professional identity (eg, agriculturalist association), educational institute attended (eg, University of Dhaka alumni), current profession (eg, geologist association), religious attachment (eg, Islamic study group) and cultural group (eg, Bangla cultural group). We met with these organisations' leaders in coffee shops and community meeting spaces to express our interest in involving them in the research process meaningfully and discussed how to move forward together on research topics that matter to the community. We also reached out to the main social organisation of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Calgary, the Bangladesh Canada Association of Calgary, whose Health & Wellness Secretary agreed to support our efforts. We took the approach of a listening campaign, which is a focused effort to connect and identify concerns and priorities of organisations and communities. This listening campaign helped us shape our vision for a community-informed research programme through community-engaged inquiry of community members' lived experiences and articulations on access to healthcare issues they

face. Realisations and learnings from outreach with GAs are presented in [table 1](#).

Joining forces with ISPOs

As previously noted, a number of different organisations are actively involved in immigrant/ethnic-minority communities in such areas as cultural, educational, religious, developmental, charity, social care and serving vulnerable members. We reached out to those organisations active in Calgary to build connections and develop trust. In this phase, we have been using our previous knowledge synthesis results^{5 6 25} and the summaries of the community listening campaign for discussions. Realisations and learnings from outreach with ISPOs are presented in [table 2](#).

FROM ENGAGEMENT TO PARTNERSHIP

Research partnerships between researchers and diverse stakeholders for research and knowledge mobilisation activities are becoming widely accepted and sometimes are being mandated by funding authorities.^{26 27} There needs to be a paradigm shift in the way community-level research is done from one in which the researcher is the sole authority to one in which researchers and stakeholders co-lead research activities by collectively applying their knowledge, expertise and skills. In our process of community-engaged research, it was enlightening for us to explore and recognise the dynamics of the different types of organisations active in the communities in which we focus our research. During our collaboration development efforts, a number of aspects helped us achieve a more meaningful approach. Details of those learnings are set out below.

Table 1 Realisations and learnings from outreach with grassroots associations (GAs)

Realisation	Learnings
<i>Grassroots associations</i>	
GAs generally focus on very specific event-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Within GAs, sociocultural organisations predominantly focus on regular cultural/recreational events, educational organisations on conducting educational sessions or faith-based organisations on religious events. ▶ In general, GAs focus on preparing and holding several predefined events that are repeated yearly, for example, Bangla new year and Eid or Puja celebrations.
Research engagement has been a distant idea for GAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is a clear lack of understanding as to why it is important for them to get involved in research or why researchers should become involved with the community. ▶ They either had not been exposed to the possibility of getting involved in any type of research as an organisation previously or they were approached to participate in a research project or disseminate a call for participants, but they were never asked to partner with a research programme.
Initiating research awareness was needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Neither the academics (eg, our research team) nor the grassroots organisations had a strong understanding of community research capacity-building needs; this issue became important, as simply creating capacity-development opportunities is insufficient. ▶ Facilitation and support for community organisations to avail themselves of research opportunities is also important; for example, we developed community scholar and citizen researcher programmes where we hold sessions on different issues related to research capacity on a monthly basis, but we needed to deliver the sessions on weeknights or weekends so that grassroots organisation members could participate.

Table 2 Realisations and learnings from outreach with immigrant service provider organisations (ISPOs)

Realisation	Learnings
<i>Immigrant service provider organisations</i>	
ISPOs appreciate the importance of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Through our engagements, we observed the desire of ISPOs to be part of research activities that aligned with their mandates. ▶ We also observed that a number of larger ISPOs have been hiring research-trained personnel to develop operational portfolios. ▶ ISPOs have also used hybrid funding opportunities to support social enterprise and innovation.
There is a lack of understanding of working styles and deliverables between academics and ISPOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ISPOs are required to work in a fast-paced environment, whereas academics tend to work at a relatively slower pace to maintain the methodological rigour of valid knowledge creation; this difference is also driven, to some extent, by differences in the deliverables expected from these two groups. ▶ ISPOs need to execute programmes to serve the people in need, whereas academics need to deliver on teaching, training and publishing.
ISPOs are overburdened by requests to collaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ISPOs are consistently approached to collaborate on academically generated research projects. ▶ ISPOs respond to those requests based on topic alignment and their relationship with the academics. ▶ There is little clarity on how they decide on collaboration requests; it seems to be based on personal leadership decisions made spontaneously based on the factors predominant at a given moment.
Academics fail to maintain post-project follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A common complaint from ISPOs pertained to the general lack of commitment from academics to follow-up with ISPOs or involve them in dissemination activities. ▶ The parachute in and out approach of data collection should be avoided.

Understanding the organisations' perspectives

It was important to understand the organisations' perspectives on getting involved in research. Different types of organisations had different perspectives that influenced their motivations. GAs were not keen on becoming involved in active research activities, but rather were more interested in being the end-users or supporters of KT activities. Alternatively, ISPOs were more inclined to participate in both research and KT activities.

Building a reciprocal trusting relationship

Our most important realisation was that trust building is an important component for partnering with any type or level of organisation. Academics need to be prepared to engage in conversations with community members. Engagement should not only involve conversing with the organisation, rather the plan should involve working together. Concurrently, it is important for organisations to be proactive towards building trusting relationship through exploring ideas on how academics' involvement can benefit the organisation. Working together has the potential to yield a tangible benefit for both organisations and academics.

Striving for mutually agreeable tasks to achieve common goals

It is important that academics and organisations establish goal consensus and work on mutually agreeable tasks to achieve those goals. With those organisations with whom we had a more successful partnership, a common goal and mutually developed working plan were very effective. We had clear conversations so that both parties were aware of each other's working style, capabilities and individual accountabilities (eg, funding authorities or institutional objectives). Most effective for us was that

the partner organisations recognised that achieving the common goal meant the working plan needed to accommodate the working process of the researchers to ensure the methodological rigour of the work, which impacts the pace (ie, getting ethics approval, ensuring adequate sample size and so on). We also understood the need to support or produce items that were time sensitive for the partner organisation. Our working plan was developed collaboratively and accommodated the needs of both parties, keeping the common goal at the forefront. GAs had less issues around the working plan, given the nature of their organisation, goals and activities. It was more important for developing partnerships with ISPOs due to their externally funded mandated activities.

Being open to conducting research the organisations identified as important

In general, academics conceive of research ideas and reach out to those organisations they feel are important stakeholders. To develop a meaningful partnership, it is good practice that academics be open to discussing research ideas relevant to organisations. From our experience, organisations, particularly ISPOs, appreciate this approach. Organisations often recognise research areas of interest to them while working in the field. However, they may need to reach out to researchers to see if anyone has an interest in the topic. Often due to unavailability of interested researchers or lack of funds and resources to conduct the research, the research needs of these organisations remain unaddressed. Through innovative approaches, organisations and researchers need to find ways to meet these research needs. Sometime some grants are available for research projects that meet the needs of an organisation, which allows and motivates researchers

to engage in research projects based on community/organisation needs. From our experience, organisations, particularly ISPOs, appreciate this approach. However, to date, this approach has not been requested to us by GAs.

Commitment to creating research capacity

We also were committed to creating research capacity within the organisations when requested. Despite extreme interest from both sides, it is often difficult to engage organisations in the entire research process due to their lack of understanding and skills required for contributing to research design, analysis and interpretation. Our approach involved designing workshops and learning sessions and making those available for the organisation members, which helped improve research capacity. In our experience, our approaches and activities not only increased relationship building, but also helped organisations realise the importance of partnerships and contributing towards a sustainable engagement. It is important for organisations to understand what the win is for them, as only a win–win scenario can move everyone forward.

Planning for shared resource mobilisation

In partnering with organisations, it is important to plan for and discuss resource allocation based on the budget for the specific project. Research funding is structured differently from service delivery or community event funding, and each party needs to be cognizant of the unique aspects of their funding allocation. Academics and organisations need to have a mutual understanding of all aspects of funding and resource allocation throughout their partnership.

Community organisations, particularly ISPOs, have a full workload. To contribute actively to research, they need to allocate staff time, which competes with other deliverables. Generally, the salaries they receive from their funders do not cover research-related activities. Our partners expressed that they would be able to contribute more meaningfully if they could be compensated for their time and resources investing in the research partnership. This could be through honorarium or time buy-out for the organisation members. This is even more difficult for GAs, whose organisational work is volunteer-based and taking up research-related activities is often not feasible. We appreciate the importance of and have strived and strategised to allocate resources for the time contributed by partner members based on their level of contribution by incorporating their roles in our funding applications. Unfortunately, we have had mixed success in these regards. We have, however, been able to appoint community members as citizen researchers in some research projects.

Equitably involving organisations

Strategic, open discussions leading to role clarity, consensus on objectives and deliverables and a mutually agreeable work plan is conducive to creating an equitably

empowered environment for research partners. The mutual learning curve for us and the organisations with whom we have worked has been steep, but these steps are critical to the process. During conversations, the need to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place between the parties was raised. MOUs are a means of documenting and formalising the intentions and general expectations of all parties. Our research programme is strongly involved with and contributes to the Newcomer Research Network (NRN) at the University of Calgary.²⁸ The NRN has signed an MOU with several organisations with whom we have been doing research, specifically ISPOs, which has been deemed useful both by the organisations and academics. However, to date, we have not engaged with GAs similarly, as most of the GAs with whom we have interacted have been less interested in this process.

Some ISPOs suggested that having a project charter for all partnered research projects would benefit sustainable partnerships. A project charter is a collectively crafted planning document that outlines the goals, objectives, partnership roles, research activities and timeline of a specific project, which helps keep the activities organised and ongoing, facilitate clear communication and minimise misunderstandings. It also helps keep project objectives and activities aligned and easy to follow-up on when there are changes in the executive and other staff positions of partner organisations or where multiple partners are involved.

PARTNERSHIP LEARNINGS

Researchers often partner with organisations on research with immigrant/ethnic-minority communities; however, often the organisation's role remains limited to providing access to community members for data collection through their community contacts or the partnership tends to be more confined for knowledge translation. While a truly community-engaged approach involving mutual connection, understanding and engagement among researchers and the community is ideal, most research does not involve this level of partnership.²⁸ The belief is that researchers tend to commodify and capitalise research on immigrant/ethnic-minority populations rather than channel it towards actually improving or empowering communities. Unless there is a solid and sustained partnership between researchers and community organisations that exceeds a particular project, ethical data collection and effective and meaningful mobilisation of research outcomes into practice is not possible. Researchers should take the first step towards building this relationship with grassroots communities and community-based organisations and ensure that organisations are not only a bridge for researchers to collect data but that these communities are an integral part of the research.

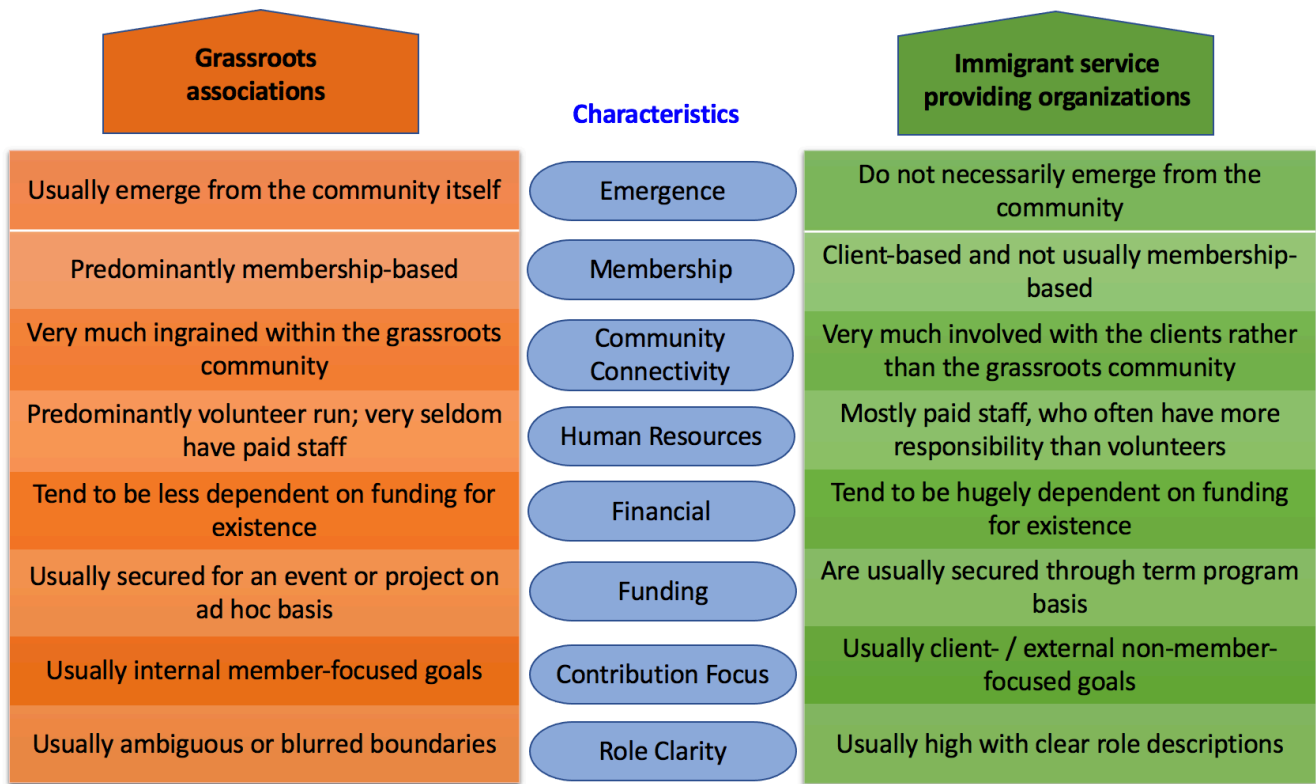


Figure 2 Fundamental differences between the grassroots associations and immigrant service providing organisations. GA, grassroots association; ISPO, immigrant service provider organisations.

The degree to which different types of organisations are representative and trusted in the community is a key element. An important insight from our work is how distinct different types of organisations are. A variety of organisations are often the partners in various research projects, but they are not differentiated in most research reports. The differences in characteristics across these organisations were important to our understanding of engagement and was crucial to how we approached, developed and maintained our relationship with an organisation. These understandings also provided important clues on executing our research-related activities, such as surveying the community and recruiting for focus groups/interviews, across different research projects. In fact, in terms of community connectivity, we found that GAs are the most extensively community-connected organisations, followed by ISPOs. In our community-engaged research process, we extensively interacted with the GAs and ISPOs, and thus we opted to focus on these types of NPOs for this reflection paper. **Figure 2** describes some fundamental characteristics across GAs and ISPOs.

We also observed a difference in community connectivity and reach across different organisations. GAs are more ingrained within communities. ISPOs serve community members but are not as rooted in the general community. They do, however, have strong ties with those they serve. **Figure 3** presents

a schematic of the connectivity of different organisations with immigrant/ethnic-minority community we observed while interacting with a range of organisations. Different service providing organisations are less connected with the general community but strongly connected with the members they serve and are quite detached from immigrant/ethnic-minority grassroots communities in that respect. As expected, the private sector was largely separated from the community in terms of connectivity.

Not every outreach initiative we have undertaken has been successful. We learnt much from our initial outreach for presenting our research programme to those organisations we identified as potential partners. We also learnt a lot during the process of working together. We realised that it is one thing to talk and plan about community-engaged research, but ‘walking the walk’ is a totally different ball game. We started conducting research with those we convinced to actively engage in our work, and we proactively kept others informed about the work being undertaken. Also, it is important that the organisations also understand the working environment the academics perform in. This will help them to contemplate towards a meaningful partnership. We believe that we, the academics, need to be proactive to initiate discussions on these aspects. We learnt from our oversights (**box 1**), and we capitalised on new opportunities for collaboration as they emerged. We were open

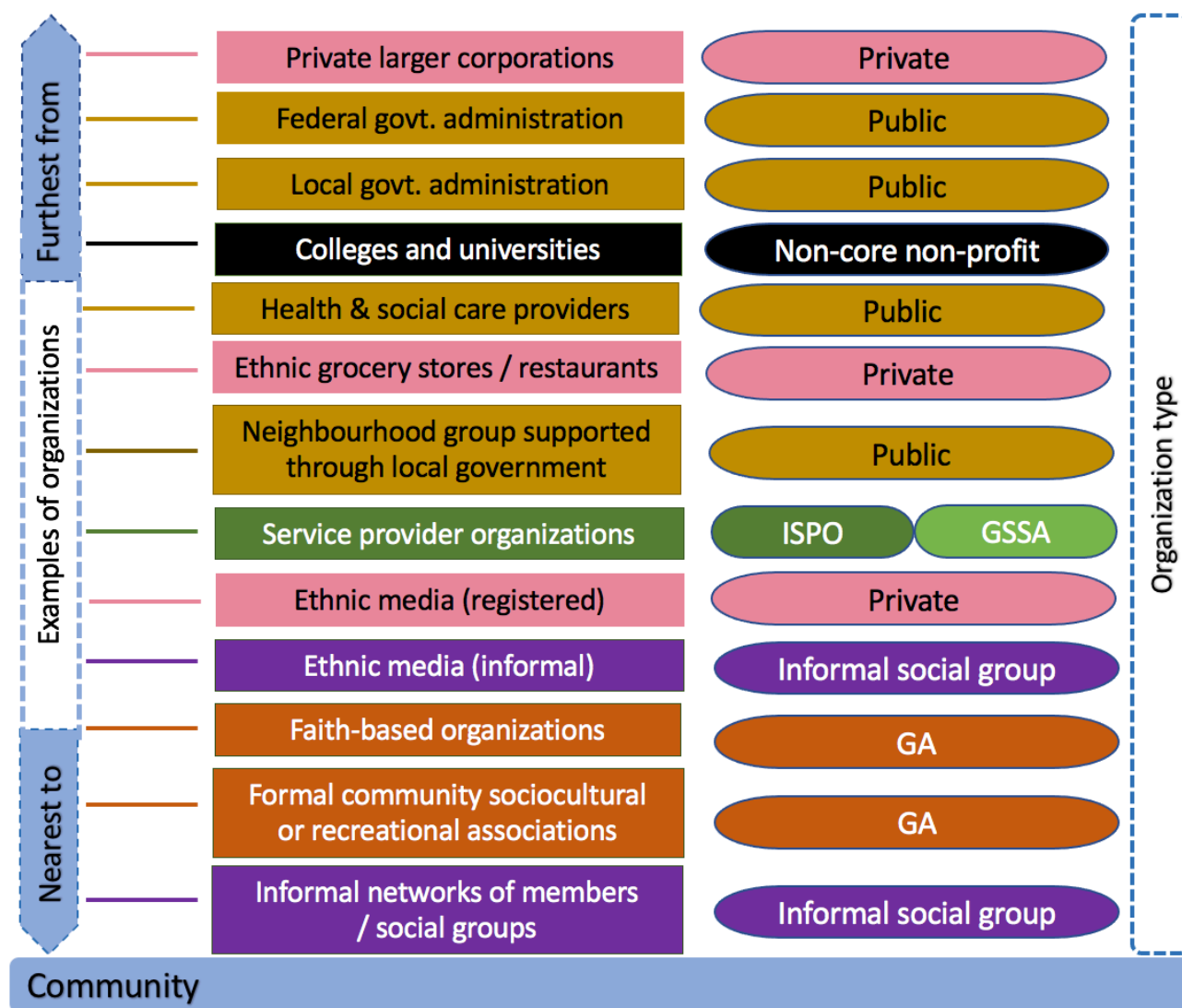


Figure 3 Level of connectivity or degree of separation of different organisations to the immigrant/ethnic-minority communities. GA, grassroots association; GSSA, general social service agency; ISPO, immigrant service providing organisation.

to learning and put forward our recommendations to develop win-win partnerships. **Box 1** summarises the approaches we felt worked and did not work in our efforts to making community-engaged research through partnership happen.

Although we reflect on our immigrant/ethnic-minority community-engaged research experience in an urban centre in Canada, the lessons learnt can be applied to other multicultural communities in Canada and other countries that welcome immigrant/racialised migrants, such as the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and a number of Western European countries. However, our learnings will need to be contextualised within the local settings, as there will be differing sociocultural scenarios and immigrant/ethnic-minority community characteristics across these countries that will impact the engagement needs and approaches for partnering with the

immigrant/ethnic-minority communities across the various locales.

CONCLUSION

The learnings from our community organisation-engaged research highlights the need to mobilise strategic and meaningful partnerships across academia and community organisations. Changing from the conventional one-time research project approach to a more sustainable and mutually beneficial collaborative programme of research approach will be valuable. Now more than ever this paradigm shift needs to happen. The goal is to facilitate the co-production and implementation of knowledge and include actors from all levels of the community to ensure equitable and empowered involvement. Without understanding the organisational diversity and degrees of

Box 1 Approaches that worked/did not work in partnering with community-based organisations

Approaches that worked

- ⇒ Understanding the type, objective, interest and capacities of the community organisation to be engaged.
- ⇒ Working towards a long-term relationship.
- ⇒ Accepting community organisations as an equal partner with shared decision-making capacity in the research partnership.
- ⇒ Flexible timeline and schedule for engagement.
- ⇒ Offering/creating a win-win situation, where the community partner gains something from the research programme.
- ⇒ Arranging compensation/honorarium for time and resources wherever possible; also, being fair and open about the possibility for compensation.
- ⇒ Valuing each organisation's agenda and aligning the research partnership goal accordingly.
- ⇒ Continuing to communicate and maintaining the relationship with the organisation, even if there is no specific project being undertaken, which builds trust that we will engage beyond the need for data collection or our own career goals.
- ⇒ Responding or offering support to the research need of an organisation even if it is beyond the scope of the research programme being undertaken, which predominantly occurred for us by providing methodology-related consultations or providing training for capacity building.

Approaches that did not work

- ⇒ Taking a parachute in and parachute out approach.
- ⇒ Not continuing to communicate once the project was completed.
- ⇒ Partnering with the organisations in the form of tokenism.
- ⇒ Researchers acting as a superior in the partnership.
- ⇒ Not being supportive towards benefits for the partner organisations.
- ⇒ Not following up with the organisations with the results and next steps of the research project.
- ⇒ Not respecting organisational goals and limitations while proposing a research partnership.

representativeness and trust they have in the community and why they are hesitant to exert time and effort towards enhancing the research capacity of their community members, we may simply be maintaining the status quo instead of establishing critical and meaningful partnerships to conduct research in the communities to which we all belong.

Author affiliations

¹Department of Family Medicine, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

²Department of Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

³The Libin Cardiovascular Institute, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

⁴O'Brien Institute for Public Health, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

⁵Sleep Center, Foothills Medical Center, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

⁶Community Scholar and Citizen Researcher, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

⁷Community Scholar and Citizen Researcher, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

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