



# The Essentials of Setting up Community-based Research Teams

## FACT SHEET



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### Setting up Community-based Research Teams

In community-based research (CBR) a project is not completed alone. Research involves many different people, each contributing different but equally important areas of expertise. It is essential to learn how to set-up a research team to guide the project. Long before the funding for a community-based research study is received planning must take place to ensure the scientific integrity and community relevance of the study. The research team will develop the research project work plan, outline the research design and contribute to developing the project budget. Well-balanced research teams have a diversity of research skills and various approaches to research including Western and Aboriginal worldviews.

Research teams are assembled based on the design of the research study, whether the study is quantitative, qualitative or a mixed method research design (Bowling 2002, Creswell 2003). In CBR, a research team will include both community members (who may also have a research background) and researchers from universities, research institutes or government who collaborate together on the project. CBR research teams can also involve only community members who come together because of a shared interest in exploring relevant questions without the involvement of researchers from universities. An essential component of the research team in CBR is community representation to monitor the research design and implementation. Community representatives can significantly contribute to the progress of a research study, validate interim analyses and advise and direct decision-making processes about important matters. Community representatives will also have the responsibility of assisting to introduce the research team and project to the broader community where the research is taking place.

The team should develop terms of reference so that systems are in place to make group decisions and problem-solve on a regular and ongoing basis. It is important that all research team members are actively and equally involved in the decision-making processes of the study so that they are able to contribute their specific skills and research perspectives to the overall integrity of the study. CAAN has developed a model for Aboriginal organizations to use when creating partnerships for research. The "Principles of Research Collaboration" are grounded in the OCAP philosophy and this document has been used in all CAAN research projects for several years. The principles outline decision making authority, clearly state responsibilities for research team members, including steps to

respect the confidentiality of research data and outline ownership of the research results. (For a template of the Principles refer to: The Essentials of Negotiating Ethical Agreements: A Fact Sheet)

A research team is ideally composed of people that contribute different areas of expertise, whether in community or in research design and analysis, etc. The team might include; someone in authority from the organization sponsoring the research – a board member, executive director or coordinator; the person(s) actually doing the research; someone with specific expertise related to the focus of the research and community stakeholders. Not all of the research team members will have an existing relationship with the organization before the research team is pulled together. This is an excellent opportunity to bring new perspectives into the organization and build capacity regarding CBR, Aboriginal peoples and/or HIV/AIDS.

There are a number of key roles on a research team:

- **Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Principal Investigators:** the person who is responsible for the proper conduct of the project, including the overall intellectual direction, administration and financial management of the project. Often a funder will require the Principal Investigator to describe all relevant research experience and a PhD may be required (but not always).
- **Co-Investigator(s):** individuals working closely with the PI, making a significant contribution to the research process but ultimately taking direction from the PI. More than one person can be identified as a co-investigator; in fact for a CBR proposal many of the other research team members (except the research co-ordinator) will be listed as co-investigators.
- **Research Coordinator:** It is essential that the research coordinator is familiar with all aspects of the study. It is also important that the research coordinator is proactive and works to facilitate all matters regarding study design, data collection and analyses, interpretation and discussion of the findings, and finally dissemination of the study findings. This person's role involves all aspects of the study including identifying and solving day-to-day problems, tracking and organizing the paper work, and coordinating all facets of the research team.

## OVERVIEW

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network is a national, not-for-profit organization:

- Established in 1997
- Represents over 200 member organizations and individuals
- Governed by a National thirteen member Board of Directors
- A four member Executive Board of Directors
- Provides a National forum for members to express needs and concerns
- Ensures access to HIV/AIDS-related services through advocacy
- Provides relevant, accurate and up-to-date HIV/AIDS information

## MISSION STATEMENT

As a key national voice of a collection of individuals, organizations and provincial/territorial associations, CAAN provides leadership, support and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. CAAN faces the challenges created by HIV/AIDS in a spirit of wholeness and healing that promotes empowerment, inclusion, and honours the cultural traditions, uniqueness and diversity of all First Nations, Inuit and Métis people regardless of where they reside.

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Effective research team management involves (Peat 2002):

- Maintaining a reliable level of trust and credibility;
- Encouraging a commitment to quality data and research practices;
- Setting realistic research priorities;
- Ensuring balance between interesting and mundane tasks for all team members;
- Encouraging staff to take responsibility for tasks they enjoy most;
- Recognizing that everyone in the team contributes to the final results;
- Holding regular meetings to foster good communication and cooperative problem solving skills;
- Ensuring that team members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- Having a clear management structure and methods for dealing with problems;
- Focusing on personal achievements and professional development; and
- Celebrating successes.

## Conclusion

Research team members who are highly motivated, competent and professional are most likely to contribute to high standards in a research project. Usually, research team members bring varied research training and experiences, such as statistics, epidemiology, social sciences, Aboriginal studies, community-based training and experience to a research process. The strength of a research team is the ability to properly integrate all of these skills and experiences into a good study design and good study implementation. With a good team in place, trust is developed as a project moves forward which is essential to any successful research project.

## Notes:

A number of sources were consulted in preparing this Fact Sheet. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) acknowledges the contribution of the following sources:

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