

Delivering on the Promise: Using Community-Based Research to Influence Public Policy

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Bob Gardner
Director Policy and Research

Why Worry About Policy?

- we are all interested in CBR that changes people's lives and contributes to tackling social and economic inequality
- a major focus of Wellesley's work is on the social determinants of health and health disparities – and policy changes needed to enhance health equity – will use these themes to illustrate
- we know there are many elements to addressing health disparities:
 - community capacity and resource building
 - community mobilization to address the structural problems that underlie health disparities
 - better service provision
 - self-empowerment for individuals → to better control their health and health opportunities
- but much of these changes flow through government policy in one way or another
- maximizing the policy impact of CBR is the focus of this workshop

The *So What* and *Now What* Workshop

- you've done some good CBR -- you've identified unmet needs, gaps or barriers in existing services, problems that need solving
- *So what?*
 - what action conclusions – specifically, what policy or programme action is needed to address the problems identified?
 - which almost inevitably requires changes in public policy
 - at best, you've identified possible policy and programme solutions to the problems or opportunities the research found
- *Now what?*
 - what needs to happen to get these solutions implemented?
 - a critical part of *Now What* is ensuring the research results have an impact with policy makers

- funds and supports community-based research on housing, poverty, social exclusion, and other social and economic inequalities as key determinants of health and health disparities
- commissions comprehensive comparative and other policy research
- identifies and mobilizes for policy alternatives and solutions to pressing issues of urban health and health equity
- works in diverse collaborations and partnerships for social innovation and progressive social change

Getting Going

- most research projects start from an environmental scan – so should we:
 - what regions are people from?
 - what sectors – community, service provider, academic, research/policy institute, government/public sector?
 - how many directly involved in CBR projects?
 - how many involved in CBR that has been part of winning policy change?
- briefly introduce yourself:
 - what organization you are from?
 - why you need to know more about policy analysis and knowledge exchange – do you have a particular project in mind?
 - what is the most important policy issue facing your organization or sector?

Agenda

- we're going to work on:
 - assessing policy implications of your research
 - identifying policy options that can address the problems identified by the research
 - analyzing the most effective – and winnable -- options
 - developing them further into concrete recommendations
 - getting these recommendations and alternatives into the policy mix, and
 - developing effective advocacy strategies to get them adopted
- with two exercises on:
 - how to identify the policy implications or potential of your research
 - how to effectively translate your findings and implications into winnable policy options and demands

Starting Points

To turn community-based research into policy action requires that:

1. policy makers know about the research and its implications → knowledge exchange strategy for all CBR projects
2. policy makers understand the basis of the problem → means CBR reports have to clearly set out the policy implications of their findings
3. you give policy makers concrete policy solutions or alternatives that will address whatever the problem is → the more 'policy-ready' the recommendations you can provide them are, the better
4. policy makers have the political will to act – often beyond the power of individual CBR projects → where advocacy, alliances and coalitions come in

Ensuring your research has impact: knowledge exchange

- Key principles include:
 - identifying who needs to know about your results – includes who can act on the findings or who can build support for action
 - know your audience
 - design your roll-out and KE strategy specifically for each audience
 - write results up in clear and accessible language, also geared to specific audiences and purposes
 - but putting them up on Web or sending a report to a few people won't be enough, also need to do systematic outreach to get results to key stakeholders
- lots of good tools and material on developing a knowledge exchange strategy – Cdn Health Services Research Foundation
- we'll focus on how this works for policy makers

First Of All: Know your Policy Environment

- to be able to do policy relevant research and assess the policy implications of your findings, you need to know:
 - the policy framework for your particular issue
 - e.g. which levels of govt, and which Ministries or depts govern your issue?
 - what are the main formal policies that shape your area?
 - just as impt – what are the unstated assumptions and constraints that shape the sphere?
 - what are trends in govt funding and policy in the area?
 - some general facets of how policy is developed and changed within governments – players, processes and constraints
 - and some specific aspects of the government of the day:
 - how does your issue relate to its overall agenda?
 - where is it in the electoral cycle?

Then Identify the Policy Implications of Research

Assess implications of research findings

- new needs or gaps in existing services identified
- community preferences or priorities determined
- barriers to getting services or support identified
- innovations or ‘best practices’
- pilot test works
- systemic inequities uncovered

What can be done with this knowledge

- service providers adapt or expand services, govts fund
- policy or resource allocations reflect community priorities
- programme or policy changes to reduce barriers
- other providers take them up
- adapt and generalize
- policy changes to address systemic basis

Exercise 1: Identifying the Policy Potential of CBR

- quickly discuss the CBR projects that you know or have been involved in that showed:
 - how existing policies or programmes were contributing to the particular problem being researched?
 - key gaps where new govt programmes were needed?
 - where existing programmes were not working well or did not have enough resources?
 - where changes in existing policy were needed?
- pick one good example of research with real policy potential and fill out what this potential is
 - our research documented Problem X and that its basis was Policy Y
 - if the policy was changed in this way, then the impact on the problem would be Z
- have someone report your example – and its policy potential – to the group

Policy Analysis into Action

To have policy impact we need to:

- understand the political and policy environment and policy process within governments
- analyze the problem(s) identified by research and identify potential policy solutions
- assess the pros and cons and cost benefits of various policy options
- choose and develop policy options that can work
- make a convincing case for them -- at best, with concrete recommendations that can be acted on
- develop a targeted knowledge exchange strategy to get the analysis and options to those who can decide

What drives political/public policy decisions?

- Timeframe of government's business/election cycle – *make the tough decisions early*
- Short attention span of politics, short shelf life of policy – *"In two years, it's not my problem"*
- Government's policy agenda/priorities – *where does this issue 'fit' within govt priorities*
- Government's communications agenda/priorities – *at crudest, how will acting on issue make the govt look? Is this consistent with how govt wants to present itself*

Policy Drivers II

- Current/prospective state of government finances – *and costs and benefits of particular policy alternatives*
- Current/prospective economic cycle – *view from Bay/Wall Street, global markets*
- Values, beliefs, ethics – *is there a social consensus around this issue?*
- Stakeholders and interests – *what competing interests and perspectives need to be taken into account?*
- Media attention/perspective, opinion polls – *understand the public mood*

How the System Really Works

The Players:

- role of legislators is quite limited (remember this for policy advocacy strategy)
- Ministers and Cabinet make policy
- political staff in Ministers and Premier's offices are very important
- complex hierarchy of civil servants – Deputy Ministers, ADMs, Directors, analysts and programme officers, etc.
 - trick is to get to the right person/place
 - who is responsible for the 'file' and has authority to act
- the courts

How the System Really Works II

The Process:

- so many demands, so little time; intense rivalries
- daily fire-fighting; often chaotic, reactive decision-making process
- highly risk averse (all the more so with new emphasis on “accountability”)
- critical role of central agencies – Finance, Cabinet Office

**for research to have an impact within govt →
need to know who decides what, when, how**

Think of Policy Development as Process

- a particular policy – or policy framework – is the result of decisions made about how to address a particular objective or problem
 - sometimes this can be a deliberate decision not to address the particular issue
- within the public service there is a generally a careful process of:
 - identifying objectives
 - assessing a range of possible actions to achieve the result
 - analyzing them against number of factors – effectiveness, cost, political context, public and community support, etc.
 - always trade-offs, compromise , different “publics” effected

Identifying Policy Options

- you also need to know what the current policy situation/environment is for your issue
 - to be able to couch your argument/demand – your ‘ask’ – in ways that are understandable to policy makers -- and winnable
 - to avoid embarrassment if your options have been tried already, and didn’t work or were rejected
- then you need to assess possible policy alternatives that will address the barriers or problems your research found
- then you assess which option is most effective for your purposes – and most ‘winnable’

Look Widely For Ideas and Options

- if possible, research what policy alternatives have been tried or considered in other jurisdictions:
 - how other jurisdictions have addressed similar policy problems
 - depending upon the issue – might mean other large cities, other provinces, comparable countries
- this can yield:
 - new ideas or options
 - examples of effective policies/programmes that could be adapted for your purposes
 - justification for your alternatives – e.g. if cost-benefits and effectiveness were demonstrated elsewhere



Analyzing Options

- policy options are the different programme, funding, and ways governments can act to meet your objectives
- to identify the best options, think of a wide range of factors such as
 - how complex and big a policy change you are looking for
 - impact (balancing criteria such as equity, efficiency, stability)
 - cost – be specific -- is it short-term, capital or operating, one-time or continuing, etc.?
 - versus benefits – specify here too – are the benefits short-term or more long term -- such as eventual reduced health care expenditures as a result of upstream investment in health promotion and prevention?
- for government, assessing cost-benefits of options is a standard part of policy process
 - for you, posing recommendations/demands in terms used and understood within the policy process increases your credibility and usability

Assess the Pros and Cons

- outline the pros:
 - effectively addressing problem that needs solving
 - the wider benefits for govt -- e.g., delivers a government commitment, equity, accountability/governance, social consensus, good messages
 - or what lessens risk
- versus the cons
 - the costs – in terms of spending or time required
 - stakeholder opposition
 - or what increases risk -- e.g., lack of “fit,” inequitable impact, liabilities (financial, legal), complexity, lack of constitutional authority
- this is never a neutral or non-political process

Consider Complexity of Implementation

- assess the best means to achieve the policy objective – to implement your recommended changes
- in the language of policy makers -- which ‘instrument’ will be used to implement the policy
- some are easier to implement than others:
 - changing legislation or regulations is most difficult
 - finding large amounts of funding is harder than smaller – esp. in fiscally conservative climate
 - changing funding or focus within existing allocations or envelopes is easier
 - changing policy guidelines and procedures of existing programmes is easiest

Choosing Options: What Turns a Policy Option into a Decision?

- It's solidly grounded – *your research evidence is clear and convincing*
- It works – *it solves the problem or at least makes it go away*
- It reflects current or emerging values – *it's grounded in social consensus, it seems like the “right thing to do”*
- Its benefits outweigh its costs
- It manages risk well – *it's relatively “safe”*
- Its investment can be justified – *it's cost-neutral or cost-effective*

Choosing Options II

- your alternative's timing is good – *in terms of govt agenda, electoral cycle or other issues*
- It “fits” – *it delivers on the government’s policy, communications, and/or fiscal agenda*
- It’s a new way of doing things – *it’s innovative*
- It reflects “good government” – *it shows political or community leadership to move towards social consensus*
- It’s a simple concept – *it’s easy to understand*
- It’s a great story – *it’s easy to explain, has a human dimension, has clear key messages*

CBR → ‘policy-ready’

- to get your findings to the intended decision makers – in ways they can understand and use – always involves **translation**
- partially this is cultural
 - into the very different languages and mind sets of govts
 - into ‘policy speak’
- partially this is very concrete – translating your findings into:
 - specific actionable policy options and recommendations
 - that will work in the existing policy environment
 - couched in the formats – cabinet briefing notes – and frameworks – cost-benefit analysis and risk management – that govts use
- the more ‘policy ready’ → the more chance for influence

Exercise 2: Developing Policy Options

- pick one issue per table in which CBR you were involved in had clear and significant policy implications
- go through the kind of analysis we have been discussing – identify implications, assess the policy environment, analyze options, pick the most effective and winnable for your purposes
- work up concrete policy options and recommendations that you can take to govt to put your alternative into action
- appoint one person to make the usual two minute report outlining your policy issue and why the option you have chosen should be adopted

Case Study: Street Health

- long-established community organization providing health and other support services to inner city homeless people in Toronto
- did a major survey of health status and needs of homeless people in winter 2006-07 – replicating pioneering study from 15 years earlier
- the best kind of CBR – driven by homeless people's needs, peer researchers did the interviewing and homeless people were involved throughout all facets, community and cross-sectoral advisory committee, and resulting in clear action plan and advocacy strategy
- found horrible health situation of homeless people – and huge barriers to getting health services they need
- uncovered the systemic basis of these problems – poverty as root of homelessness, lack of affordable housing, constant stress and danger
- set out clear programme and policy action plan

Case Study: Street Health II

- their research documented the horrible health conditions homeless people face and the systematic barriers to the care they need
- they identified ways that these problems could be addressed
- they broke up areas where action was needed and developed concrete recommendations for each:
 - addressing poverty and inequality that underlie homelessness
 - improving access to affordable housing
 - improving living conditions for homeless people
 - improving access to health care and support

Case Study: Street Health III

- they translated this action plan into ‘policy speak’:
 - with targets, indicators, cost benefit analysis
 - with concrete and actionable policy and programme recommendations
 - specifying which level of government and agency needed to act on what
- they identified target govt and media audiences for their findings and undertook sustained outreach to get their recommendations taken up
- WI worked with Street Health to broker links into:
 - local regional health authority
 - the Minister of Health
 - Cabinet Office, leading health and other officials
- they are doing a series of more detailed bulletins on specific facets of the research – the first was on Hepatitis C and harm reduction

Making the Case

- Reference the issue and how you've framed it – *this solves the problem as we understand it*
- Translate the policy solution into a communication strategy – *this is what it means*
- Explain the “why” - summarize and highlight the rationale, including the political benefit – *this is why we're recommending this*
- Analyze and acknowledge the risks – *legal challenge, cost pressures, inequity/disparate impact, adverse public/media/community reaction, being off-message, stakeholder pressures (“floodgates”), timing, etc.*

Knowledge Exchange for Policy Makers

- know your audience -- and the policy environment and way of thinking within govts
- customize reports for policy audiences
 - separate/short policy implications summaries
 - translate into terms they understand and with concrete recommendations they can act on
 - use the forms they are used to – decks and briefing notes
 - e.g. always address cost benefits, risk management, options and other factors that govt policy makers think about
- systematic outreach and follow up with policy makers
 - identify people who could be making the decisions – audience again
 - get findings & policy implications to them
 - meeting is best, plus covering letter/brief
 - as part of long-term strategy to build relationships with key policy makers in your spheres

Enhance Impact Through Partnerships

- policy analysis is a specialized – and often arcane – trade
- it isn't effective to try to learn it all for yourself
- who can help?
 - get experienced policy people on CBR advisory team early on
 - even better, get Ministry, dept or other officials you hope to influence involved from the start – get them to help define the questions they need answered
 - get advice on policy analysis or the environment for your issue – one source is service provider or professional associations

Wellesley Institute Role

- work with projects we fund and other research partners:
 - provide advice on policy implications and environment from design stage onwards
 - help in translating findings into policy ready analyses and options/recommendations
 - help to broker contacts with appropriate officials and stakeholders
 - promote particular projects, and CBR in general, in the wider policy circles in which we work
- have developed various workshops focusing on exactly this problem of translating results into policy alternatives, knowledge exchange, policy advocacy and effective presentation to policy makers

Policy Advocacy

- to win the policy changes you have identified you need:
 - luck – “the right issue at the right time” -- but be ready to seize opportunities when they arise -- proactive opportunism
 - broad understanding of the issue and the political and public policy context in which it exists – emphasized earlier
 - relevance of your objective to the govt's needs, priorities, context, constraints
 - translating your findings and recommendations into ‘policy ready’ terms as much as possible
 - situating your issue as part of a broader coalition or campaign
 - and pulling all this together – an advocacy strategy

Social movements and political change

- the most effective advocacy campaigns – with the best chances of success – are part of wider coalitions and movements
- it's movements that win real change – not just individual advocacy campaigns, however good they are
- think of the really significant historical shifts in public policy and the role of govts – where did they come from?
 - employment equity would not have happened without strong women's and labour movements
 - Medicare and public health system was the result of long campaigns
 - treatment and funds for HIV/AIDS were won by grass-roots organizing

Take the ‘Long View’

- think long-term – significant policy change can take many years
- but also look for immediate winnable issues
 - to build momentum and hope
 - but be careful of co-optation & short-term reforms that deflect from long-term goals
- Caledon Institute for Social Policy has term “relentless incrementalism”
- have good peripheral vision -- situate your issue in relation to
 - other comparable issues → to build coalitions – the wider the better, with ‘unusual suspects’ as well
 - the overall govt policy agenda -- back to ‘fit’

Opportunity: Realizing the Policy Potential of CBR

- the strategic environment for policy impact of CBR may be promising:
 - govt and other policy stakeholders increasingly – if unevenly -- see CBR as a credible and valuable method
 - good CBR can yield the ‘evidence’ that is supposed to drive policy making in modern governments
 - a stronger claim = CBR yields better knowledge of needs, perspectives and strengths of the most marginalized communities → vital to policy action on health disparities and many other problems
 - emphasis on community engagement in govt planning has also created more space for community-driven methods
- to realize this potential we need to ensure that CBR:
 - is seen as evidence -- different but just as valuable as traditional quantitative data that is the norm in govt circles
 - is scientifically sound, rigorous, solidly rooted in communities and policy relevant

Key Messages

- to ensure our CBR has a real impact on policy requires:
 1. understanding the environment in which govt policy decisions are made
 2. getting research findings to the right people – in terms they can use
 3. being able to identify the policy implications of our research and to translate that into concrete policy options to solve the problems we have found
 4. assessing the most effective – and winnable – policy options
 5. being able to make an effective – and winning -- case for our policy recommendations
 6. tying our research and policy advocacy into wider campaigns and alliances for social change will maximize its impact

Further Resources

- Wellesley has a page on enhancing the policy impact of CBR at <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/issues/community-based-research/cbr-policy-impact>
- CCPH also has material on its site at <http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/index.html>
 - including Cassandra Ritas' *Speaking Truth, Creating Power* guide to policy work for CBR practitioners at http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/ritas.pdf
- the Kellogg Foundation has useful guides and toolkits on influencing public policy at <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=75&CID=280&NID=61&LanguageID=0>

Contact Us

- these speaking notes, further resources on community-based research with policy impact, and a great deal more on health equity and the social determinants of health are on our site at <http://wellesleyinstitute.com>
- my email is bob@wellesleyinstitute.com
- I would be interested in any comments on the ideas in this presentation and on initiatives or experience you're involved in that address these challenges