

## A Guide to Community Engagement in Research

Community engagement transforms research from a process done *to* people into a process done *with* people. It's a collaborative partnership that values community expertise at every step, leading to more ethical, relevant, and impactful outcomes.

### What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement in research is the process of working collaboratively with individuals, groups, and organizations to inform, shape, and guide the research process. It moves beyond the traditional model where communities are only subjects of study, and instead recognizes them as essential partners in knowledge creation.

This partnership involves active listening, co-design, and collaboration through all stages of research—from initial planning and design to implementation, analysis, and dissemination of findings. When done well, it builds trust, ensures the research is relevant, and dramatically increases the likelihood that the results will be adopted and truly benefit the community.

### Why Community Engagement Matters

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- Builds Trust: Establishes open, respectful, and lasting relationships between researchers and the community.
  - Ensures Relevance: Guarantees the research addresses real, meaningful community priorities and needs, not just academic interests.
  - Upholds Ethics: Actively safeguards the dignity, rights, and cultural values of community members.
  - Leads to Better Data: Engaged and respected participants are more likely to provide richer, more accurate, and more honest information.
  - Promotes Empowerment: Shifts the dynamic, moving communities from passive subjects to active, empowered collaborators.
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### The Community Engagement Process: A Step-by-Step Guide

Our approach at GRI is built on a foundation of respect and collaboration. Here is our framework for meaningful engagement:

### **1. Pre-Mobilization: Do Your Homework**

Before any contact, learn about the community's culture, social structure, leadership, history, and prior experiences with research. This preparation is crucial for building respect and avoiding missteps.

### **2. Initial Contact & Official Approvals**

Researchers must first obtain necessary permits from local government authorities. This process typically follows existing administrative channels, from regional to district to local community leaders. Direct contact with community members should only begin after these approvals are secured.

### **3. Community Entry & Introduction**

Make formal, in-person introductions to community leaders and groups. Clearly explain the study's purpose, listen to concerns, answer questions, and set clear, mutual expectations for the partnership.

### **4. Co-Design & Ongoing Collaboration**

True engagement doesn't end after introductions. Involve community members in shaping research questions, advising on culturally appropriate methods, and providing continuous feedback.

### **5. Research Implementation**

Maintain transparent communication throughout data collection. Keep leaders and participants informed and ensure they have clear channels to voice any concerns.

### **6. Reporting Back**

Share the results in accessible, understandable formats—such as community meetings, translated summaries, or visual presentations. This demonstrates respect and accountability to your partners.

### **7. Dissemination & Thoughtful Exit**

Close the loop thoughtfully. Thank the community, share how the findings might benefit them, and, if possible, discuss ways to sustain the positive outcomes of the collaboration.

