Reviewer’s report

Title: What Fosters Sustainability and Systemic Transformation? Insights from a Realist Analysis of Trust-Building in Community Based Participatory Research.

Version: 2  Date: 13 February 2015

Reviewer: Clement K Gwede

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well written paper and the concept as conceived contributes or extends scientific knowledge in the public health field and specifically in the area of CBPR. While there are no serious deficiencies, a number of questions need to be addressed to help improve the manuscript as follows:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Background: Provide further justification for selecting only successful partnerships; there is a lot more meaningful information that could be learned from unsuccessful or failed partnerships.

2. Sampling and Methods: It is unclear how the 13 academic respondents and 8 community members were distributed across the 11 partnerships. For example did some partnership have more than 1 academic respondent; if so how many? Similarly for the 8 community members?

3. Results: Results are not well organized to discern how the themes were derived from interview guide questions. Perhaps add the Interview Question, then state/report the theme findings with associated quotes. Also, a predominant majority of quotes are from academic partners and few from community members? Community voice is very light.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Although mixed qualitative methods (individual interviews and focus group) and mixed interview approaches (in person and by telephone) provides flexibility, are there limitations?

2. Sampling and Methods: Although probably spell out elsewhere, perhaps authors can summarize the advantages of the realist methodology here.

3. Sampling and Methods: Was double coding with two independent coders used? Or was the approach simply a sequential confirmation “feedback” of data/analysis by a second author? Why was this approach selected?

4. Results: The first paragraph of Results reads like Methods. Consider moving all or some of the text.

5. For all three figures, a note at the bottom to explain each figure might help.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'