Reviewer's report

Title: A Realist Evaluation of Community-Based Participatory Research: Partnership synergy, trust building and related ripple effects

Version: 3  Date: 3 May 2015

Reviewer: Nina Wallerstein

Reviewer's report:

Thank you to the authors for their responsiveness in answering the critiques which I posed as well as those posed by the other reviewers.

Major Compulsory:

1) I have one recommendation and then several issues to raise which I think could be well addressed in the limitations section:

The first recommendation is that the authors add a few more “measurement references” which are more recent from the UCLA/RAND group from Khodoyakov, Dmitri and colleagues (as a continuation from the Jones, Wells, Chung references), which also have discussion of implications for theory of how participation influences outcomes. This could slightly expand the discussion section; and add to the first measurement cites in the intro.

2) The second issue concerns their conclusion that trust relationships may matter more than structural issues or logistics. I would take issue with this due to the growing literature from First Nations and US Tribal research that talks about sovereignty and MOUs for data sharing and ownership agreements, among other issues. See also the recent just published Oetzel et al paper in AJPH on governance in CBPR. It may be that none of their partnerships were with Native populations, but still this dynamic between relationship and structural is an open empirical question. Structural issues are not just important to tribal communities, but also to other community groups who are forming community IRBs or Review Boards with a growing recognition in the literature. I would suggest, therefore, they not be so definite in their conclusion, but just state that their specific data shows the importance of relationship issues and the changing nature of this trust development and how it influence outcomes over time (their figures show this very well). I would then suggest they add the caveat in the limitations section, that there may be other structural issues that become relevant in multiple contexts and at different times, though they weren’t discussed in this particular realist review…. or they can create their own limitation statement.

3) Finally, I saw from one other reviewer that there was an imbalance of academic quotes versus community quotes. (I only counted 2 community quotes). This needs to be stated in the limitations section as well that the community voice was less represented.
Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on an important research project for advancing our knowledge of how CBPR works… Nina Wallerstein

**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' below.