

*"If I participate, knowingly or otherwise,  
in my sister's oppression and she calls  
me on it, to answer her anger with my  
own only blankets the substance of our  
exchange with reaction. It wastes energy.  
And yes, it is very difficult to stand still  
and to listen to another woman's voice  
delineate an agony I do not share or one to  
which I myself have contributed."  
~ Audre Lorde*

## SECTION 2: PREPARATION AND PLANNING

This section moves from describing CBPR to preparing for action. In doing so, we shift to engaging you, the reader, more directly. There are probably many reasons why you were drawn to domestic violence focused research. You may have personal experiences with violence and abuse or other forms of oppression. Or perhaps you have been inspired by mentors, practitioners, or researchers involved in the field. Possibly, your interest in domestic violence is rooted in feminism. Or maybe your interest stems from volunteering or working with survivors in other capacities. Similarly, there may be a variety of reasons why you are attracted to using CBPR approaches. Maybe you are a social person and want to find new ways to collaborate with people. Or perhaps your social justice values undergird your interest in community collaboration and you may be interested in working against oppression, and/or conducting research that directly improves community conditions.

### **This Section is Divided into Two Parts:**

- How to engage in self-reflection necessary for conducting CBPR in the domestic violence arena
- How to learn about the community with which you'd like to collaborate.



## How to Engage in Self-Reflection

Most researchers are trained in ways that conflict with the basic tenets of CBPR. For example, many are trained:

- To emphasize personal ownership and independent decision-making when it comes to the research processes ("I"), instead of emphasizing a research process developed collaboratively through careful navigation of power and mutual capacity building ("we").
- To frame research questions so as to emphasize community deficits rather than community strengths.
- To believe that good research is rooted in ideas originating from academia rather than in ideas rooted in communities.
- To believe that sound empirical evidence cannot incorporate community perspectives in its designs or methods.
- To believe that publishing in peer-reviewed journal articles is the endpoint of a research process rather than seeing the importance of disseminating research in multiple ways, especially to the people in the best positions to use the findings to inform practice and policy.

Because the tenets of traditional research approaches do not always align well with CBPR, it is essential that you have a clear vision about what brings you to CBPR, why you choose to do the work this way, and what will keep you here for the long haul.



### Community-Based Program:

an organization whose policies, practices, and processes align to meet the needs of a particular community, sometimes focused a particular issue, usually defined by neighborhood or cultural or social identities.



### **Jenny Fauci, Ph.D. Student in Counseling Psychology at Boston College, describes her journey into CBPR**

*When I began my CBPR journey, I believe my heart was in the right place; however, heart is only the very beginning. I had a ton of work left to do—particularly on myself, and in regards to the work that came before me. As part of this journey, I am particularly indebted to a woman who worked at one of the first organizations I partnered with. I'll call her Lena. She began our conversation with a simple and profound question: "Why should we tell you our stories?" The organization was run by and for women who were formerly or currently involved in the criminal justice system. Most were women of color; many were low or no-income; all had at least one personal experience with the system. None of these descriptions apply to me. I—a White, socioeconomically privileged, non-system involved woman— was interested in learning more about the increasing involvement of these young women in the system from their perspectives. But why me, and then what? In our conversation, Lena told me that someone had sought out women in their community in a similar fashion and was now being interviewed as the "expert." I'm not like that, I thought. But, how would I work differently?*

*This question made me confront, in a deeply personal way, not only who I didn't want to be, but who I was (and ultimately, who I wanted to be). I had unknowingly assumed that having a critical analysis and an alignment of core values was enough. I came in thinking I was aware of my privileged position, the potential for exploitation, the importance of hard work and listening, the value of building relationships, and the necessity of the question I was being asked. I was well-versed in the critique about people like me.*

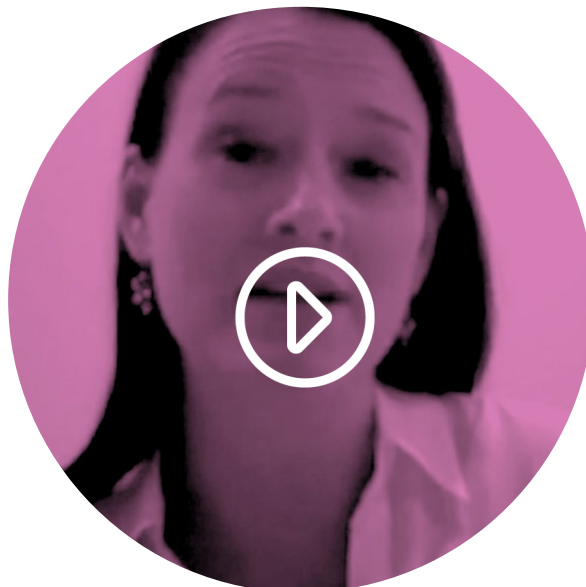
*However, it wasn't until I was personally accountable to someone who was generous enough to directly confront me that I started wrestling with new questions about why and how I was doing the work—in this organization and beyond. This question led me to more questions: What do listening and learning really look like in a day-to-day, personal way? How can I be more creative in building this partnership: what are the ways I can learn and contribute? Would could I offer from the research world that is meaningful and sustainable rather than harmful? How will I let people get to know me and how will I get to know them, across all our differences? Given the risks of telling your story, the legacy of harm, and the potential to build something new together, how would it work to make sure that this research really "matters" to the people I'm working with? For me, CBPR is not the answer, but it opens up the possibility of questions that need to be asked and addressed, including Lena's.*





"Benefits of conducting CBPR in an academic context" by Nkiru Nnawulezi,  
PhD, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

If you do not understand yourself as an instrument in this work, you will fundamentally misunderstand your own actions and reactions, as well as those of others. Self-knowledge and reflection will help you to minimize the risk of unintentionally introducing bias into your research projects or tensions in your relationships with your community partner.



"How biases about the research process can affect your CBPR work"  
by Amanda Stylianou, PhD, Safe Horizon



"Motivations for choosing a CBPR approach" by Kristie A. Thomas, PhD,  
Simmons College

## Pre-Work Self-Reflection Exercise

### Questions to Ask Yourself

**What are your personal and professional reasons for wanting to conduct CBPR?**

### Why These Questions Are Important

Although CBPR can be professionally rewarding, the benefits you gain may differ from those that flow from more traditional research. For instance, because CBPR involves deep, authentic collaboration with community partners, the research will be relevant to practice and the process in line with your values. The converse is that deep collaboration is labor intensive. CBPR researchers still write grants, publish, and have highly successful academic careers; but they likely have to balance these with other activities in a way that traditional researchers do not. Thus, it is worth thinking about what "productivity" means for you.

**What are some of the personal reasons that led you to want to study domestic violence in general?**

If one of those reasons is personal experience with trauma – whether your own, your loved one’s or your community’s – it is important that you have taken steps to process and integrate those experiences. Otherwise, you risk a host of potential problems, such as feeling overwhelmed or triggered by exposure to trauma, feeling that you have to save your participants because you so identify with their pain, or becoming burnt-out. Even if you have done work to address your own trauma, you’ll need to make sure you have supports in place to protect yourself and those with whom you work to avoid being re-traumatized.

**What particular aspects of domestic violence are you interested in studying and why?**

As you think about areas of interest within the field of domestic violence, consider to what extent your interests will appeal to fellow researchers, practitioners, and survivors. Some areas may overlap well and some may not. Does your interest area have very clear practice relevance? Remember even if you bring an area of interest to the collaboration, the specific research question is likely to emerge or sharpen from conversation with your community partners.

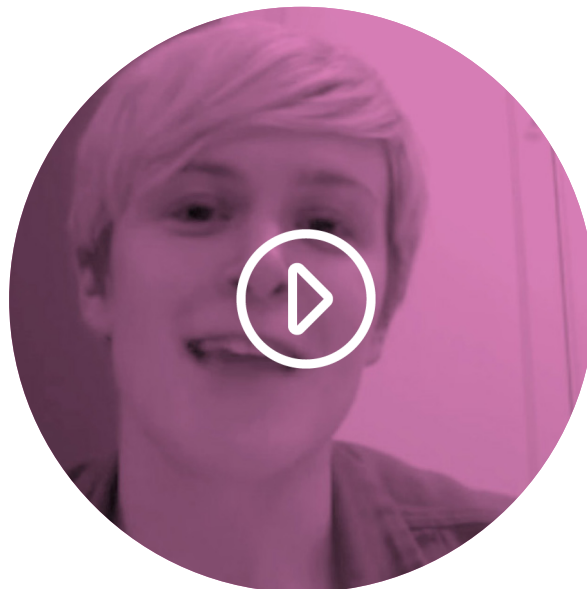
**How do you think about the problem of domestic violence, particularly what causes it and what will end it?**

Although your understanding of domestic violence will grow with time and experience, it is useful to begin a CBPR project having thought critically about what causes partner violence and how it can be eliminated. Community partners will have their own formulation and will want to know yours so that they can determine whether the two align. For example, many programs have developed an intersectional analysis that recognizes not only gender oppression but other forms of structural oppression as well. Given this philosophy, they may be less interested in questions

**How does your personal history and social location (e.g., race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, geography, immigration status) shape your interest in domestic violence and in CBPR?**

that attempt to pin down individual-level causes. If you do not share this understanding, it may be difficult to work together to identify a research question or interpret the implications of findings.

Researchers enter a CBPR partnership with a range of identities that may or may not overlap with those of the communities with whom they are partnering. It is critical to consider how these identities continuously and inevitably shape your own and others' way of engaging in the work. Your community partners may have acute senses of their own social locations and will want to know that you have thought about yours. Be sure that you have done the work to explore your intersecting identities, including how they inform your decision to conduct CBPR, how they might facilitate or hinder relationship building with community partners, and how you can engage in honest dialogue about your social location. We discuss this more specifically throughout the toolkit.



**"Exploring how your personal history and social location informs your CBPR work"**  
by Carrie Lippy, PhD, The National LGBTQ Institute on IPV

**How will engaging in CBPR work fit within your career, including your own and your institution's metrics and expectations for success and promotion?**

All researchers come into CBPR projects with their own set of needs, which may or may not make CBPR a good fit. For example, researchers in academic institutions need their projects to result in scholarly products such as journal articles and conference presentations, as these are necessary for tenure and promotion. They often need to devote time to teaching obligations and administration, as well as research, which means balancing their time carefully. Many are expected to generate some if not all of their own salaries through grant money. Prior to engaging in CBPR, consider carefully how this work may fit into your greater career trajectory. Good preparation may lead to creative strategies that will enable you to circumvent obstacles. For example, it might make sense to have several small and manageable research projects in place alongside a larger CBPR study, or to request funds to engage in CBPR as part of a faculty start up package.



**"Considering whether CBPR will align with your career goals and the demands of your discipline"**  
by Kristie A. Thomas, PhD, Simmons College



**"Preparing your academic institution for your CBPR work"**  
by Nkiru Nwawulezi, PhD,  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County



## How to Learn About the Community with Which You'd Like to Collaborate

At its core, CBPR is about partnership. Partnership, in turn, involves mutual understanding. Yet, researchers often come into a CBPR collaboration without an appreciation for the history, diversity, boundaries, tensions, power structures, or dynamics of the community (Burke et al., 2013; Muhammad et al., 2015).

At the broadest level, engaging in CBPR in the domestic violence arena requires learning about the rich and diverse histories, philosophies, and organizational strategies that shape the work of domestic violence programs. For example, some programs have been in existence for decades, having emerged during the early years of the domestic violence movement; these may be more likely to use the feminist, consensus model of decision-making of early domestic violence programs. Other are only a few years old and, thus, have very little institutional memory; these may use a more hierarchical structure.

Some programs may be rooted in a social justice orientation that highlights the intersecting forms of oppression that undergird domestic violence; others may take a more social services approach, focusing on the proximal causes of violence in the survivor's immediate situation (Wilson, Fauci & Goodman, 2015). Some domestic violence programs are



*"Strategies for learning about the diverse history of the DV movement"*  
by Josie Serrata, PhD, National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families & Communities,  
a project of Casa de Esperanza

community-based; others are hospital-based or located on military bases. Some provide shelter; others provide counseling and advocacy but no shelter. Some provide services for abusers; most do not. Some support hundreds of survivors; others serve only a handful at a time. Some programs are culturally affirming, in that their policies, practices, and processes highlight the role of culture in all aspects of the organization's functioning; others are culturally specific in that their policies, practices, and processes reflect one specific cultural/racial group's reality throughout the entire organizational structure; and still others are considered "mainstream," in that they don't prioritize work with any specific cultural group and perhaps build on mainstream culture as the basis for decision making (Casa de Esperanza, 2001). Thus, there is no monolithic "practitioner community." Each of these dimensions of a program's history, philosophy, structure, and approach influences both its willingness to collaborate with researchers and the ways it enters into a partnership.

Understanding your community partners' prior experiences with research is also critical. Many organizations have experienced negative interactions with researchers or belong to communities that have endured a legacy of researcher harms (Banks et al., 2013; Israel, Lichtenstein, Lantz, McGranaghan, Allen, & Guzman, 2001; Chavez, Duran, Baker, Avila, & Wallerstein, 2008; Wahab et al., 2014). For example, many domestic violence researchers conduct what is often called "drive-by data collection" (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009). That is, they seek out domestic violence organizations to gain access to survivors, but they do not incorporate practitioner expertise beyond the data collection process; many do not even share the research findings with the organizations or survivors. Practitioners in the Domestic Violence Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative, for example, report experiences such as learning they were included in a researcher's grant application only when the funding was obtained and they were expected to "produce" participants.



### **Culturally Affirming Program:**

An organization whose policies, practices, and processes reflect a deep appreciation for the value that culture brings to staff, operations, management and leadership.



"Why Get Involved" by Ronit Barkai, Deborah Collins-Gousby, and Deborah Heibel

Practitioners have also reported seeing the results of their work published in a way that renders their own contributions invisible. For example, staff members at Casa de Esperanza, a Latina-specific organization, have become hesitant to collaborate with researchers they do not know well after working with researchers who discounted their expertise, questioned their perspectives and opinions, or made overtly racist statements in meetings. Domestic violence researchers have also harmed communities by asking only a narrow set of questions that privilege certain communities over others. For example, researchers sometimes foreground white heterosexual female participants without acknowledging this limitation, thereby creating decontextualized understandings of partner violence that ignores race, class, and sexual orientation (Richie, 2012). In general, practitioners often have a good sense of how the traditional process of knowledge production has undervalued or ignored practitioner wisdom and marginalized specific communities, and they may be wary of researchers who are unaware of this historical context.

The table below lists some factors for you to consider as you get to know your community partners, whether they are practitioners and/or survivors.

### Critical Factors to Understand About the Domestic Violence Programs with which You Are Partnering

Topic	Details
Experience / history with research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Program's and community's prior experience and history with research, including historical harms</li></ul>
Sociopolitical context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Community, state, and federal policies within which the programs may operate</li><li>● Community, state, and federal policies within which the programs may operate</li><li>● Social movements that created particular programs and supports for domestic violence survivors</li><li>● Impact of current sociopolitical events and mainstream culture on the community, including sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression</li><li>● History of community trauma</li><li>● Community and neighborhood context in which the program operates</li></ul>
Program background & characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Duration of program's existence</li><li>● Size &amp; budget of program</li><li>● Nature and timing of the program's funding cycle (e.g., if grant supported, at what times of the year are staff members writing grants and reports)</li></ul>



### Program philosophy and orientation

- Location (e.g., community (rural or urban), hospital, military base)
- Services provided (e.g., shelter, counseling, immigration help, no services for abusers, safety-planning, housing support)
- Staff leadership structure (e.g., hierarchical; feminist, consensus model)
- Board leadership structure, including whether the staff report to the board
- Stability and turnover in staff
- Composition of organizational staffing (e.g., numbers of paid staff, interns and volunteers who provide services)

Some examples (which may overlap):

- Social justice orientation: highlights intersecting forms of oppression undergirding domestic violence (Wilson, Fauci, & Goodman, 2015)
- Social services approach: focuses on the proximal causes of violence in the survivor's immediate situation (Davies & Lyons, 2013)
- Culturally affirming: policies, practices, and processes reflect a deep appreciation for the value that culture brings to staff, operations, management and leadership (Casa de Esperanza, 2001)
- Culturally specific: policies, practices, and processes reflect one cultural/racial group's reality throughout the entire organizational structure (Casa de Esperanza, 2001)
- Mainstream: build on mainstream culture as the basis for decision making (Casa de Esperanza, 2001)

If your collaboration is with practitioners working across a variety of programs, your job will be more complex but no less important. You will need to learn about how these practitioners and organizations they represent understand and relate to each other. Do they share philosophies and orientations? Are there enduring differences or complex alliances across people and programs? The more you understand the lay of the land, the better you will be able to navigate the inevitable tensions that arise.





"Regional Collaboration" by Ronit Barkai, Deborah Collins-Gousby, and Deborah Heime

Finally, it is important to identify as clearly as possible the people within the program or set of programs with whom you are partnering. Are you working only with program leaders? Or are you working with program staff as well? Are you hearing from survivors through program staff, or directly? Ideally you will get as broad a representation as possible of the voices within an organization, but that will take some real thought and planning. What can you do to expand the possibilities for collaboration with as broad a representation of one or more organizations as possible? What kinds of structures do you need to put in place to ensure that happens? For example, do you need to go to them rather than asking them to come to you? How do you think about staff turnover? How can you learn which voices are systematically left out of discussions? All of these are critical considerations in determining who the community is, and how you will come to know them.

As you consider these various issues, be aware of your own privileges and biases that influence how you view the issue of domestic violence, how you interact and communicate with others, and how you might overgeneralize your own limited knowledge (Minkler, 2005). We all have our own blind spots it is important to continually work to recognize them and directly address them. Be humble and honest about what you do and do not know. Similarly, researchers, especially those from marginalized



### Practice Tip

Sometimes a request for partnership will come from organizations that are physically located in cities or towns far away from the researcher. If this is the case, the researcher should consider whether there is a trusted local partner with CBPR experience who might be more appropriate, as distance can limit true relationship-building.



communities, should remain aware of what community members may assume about you based on your own identities. Since structural oppression can work in a multitude of ways, the self-reflection pre-work described in the previous section remains a key way for researchers to prepare for how they engage with communities (Muhammad et al., 2015).

In the next table, we provide some suggestions for how you can find out more about domestic violence programs and communities – beyond the standard literature review – to enhance your understanding of their history and context.

### Where You Can Find Valuable Information About the Domestic Violence Programs with which You Are Partnering

<b>Internet search</b>	Keep in mind, however, that unlike other community organizations, domestic violence programs may minimize publically available or web-based information, both for safety- and resource-related reasons. As such, learning even basic information about local organizations often requires personal contact with staff.
<b>Document review of organizational materials (including policy and training manuals, orientations for participants, etc.)</b>	Think of this as equivalent to doing a literature review at the start of a traditional research project. The document review will help the researcher gain deep insight about the mission, values, and structural and cultural practices that guide the organization; and will do so without requiring a significant time commitment from practitioners. It is especially important to remember when working with marginalized communities that expecting community members to educate non-members is part of a legacy of oppression and an expectation of free labor. The onus is on you to educate yourself wherever possible so as to minimize the burden on communities.
<b>In-person or phone meetings</b>	Talk with leaders and administrators of relevant organizations, as well as practitioners and survivors themselves. Learn about which

**Direct observation**

staff members in the organization have institutional knowledge, and ask if you can talk with one of them. Be respectful of their time, and come prepared with short, clear agendas and questions. Ensure that such meetings offer staff an opportunity to ask you questions as well.

Ask staff if they would mind if you came in to observe program operations or staff meetings, participate in an activity or event, or otherwise “hang-out” without getting in the way. Be mindful of the organization’s requirements to protect survivor confidentiality and safety when making such requests.

**Volunteering at a program**

Programs usually welcome offers of help. Some community organizations actually require some sort of volunteer commitment from potential researchers. For example, at a family violence intervention program for Latino families in Georgia, students interested in conducting research with the organization must volunteer for six months before they can even propose a potential project. This ensures that student researchers are familiar with the organization, its values and approach, and the families it serves.





# POWER THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

## A CBPR TOOLKIT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCHERS

