

Community-Driven Publishing Leads to Community-Oriented Solutions

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Publishing is a hallmark activity in academia, where professional scientists strive to share their research findings in high-impact journals. However, this practice doesn't always align with the realities of non-academia, community-focused projects. In these contexts, project leaders are frequently immersed in addressing pressing challenges and may not have the resources available or see the immediate benefits of publishing their work. When a community-based project demonstrates promising results, the typical response is to integrate these findings into existing practices and shift focus to the next urgent issue. The cycle of addressing immediate needs often means that the valuable insights and successes achieved through these projects remain underreported and underutilized in the broader discourse. Despite this, publishing community-focused work is crucial as it validates the efforts of those on the ground, contributes to a wider knowledge base, and has the potential to influence policy and practice on a larger scale. By documenting and sharing their results, community-based projects can gain recognition, attract support, and provide models for replication, ultimately enhancing the impact and sustainability of their efforts.

In my previous roles as a registered nurse and healthcare administrator, where I managed educational programming for a small rural hospital, I frequently experienced a profound sense of fulfillment and satisfaction when engaging in community-based projects, particularly when they involved projects tailored to meet the specific needs of my community. I must be honest—while some projects achieved remarkable success, many fell short of our goals. However, more often than not, these endeavors provided us with valuable insights into what *didn't* work rather than what *did*. These lessons, though challenging, were crucial in guiding our future efforts, whether it meant refining our approach or pivoting to new strategies to address the need. Despite our

commitment and the invaluable lessons learned, our impact was often confined to the organization or community itself. Limited time and resources constrained our ability to share these findings more broadly or to influence practices beyond our immediate environment. Consequently, we would transition immediately to the next issue, often leaving valuable insights unshared.

Publishing community-level work is essential for several reasons, primarily because it amplifies local efforts and insights by enhancing visibility, validation, and impact. This dissemination can attract recognition and attention from policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders, which is crucial for sustaining and scaling project initiatives (Ivey & Borchardt, 2024). Moreover, sharing community-level work supports informed decision-making for community-based organizations (CBOs) by providing access to valuable data from similar initiatives (Yoon & Copeland, 2020). It facilitates knowledge sharing and the development of networks among organizations engaged in similar work. By leveraging the latest scientific research, CBOs can design and implement evidence-based programs and interventions with a higher likelihood of achieving desired outcomes. Beyond this, publishing such work also fosters knowledge sharing across different populations, communities, and regions. It facilitates replication and scaling by offering models for similar initiatives elsewhere. Furthermore, it enhances the credibility and reputation of the organizations and individuals involved, while empowering communities through acknowledgment of their contributions and providing a platform to share their stories.

In the 1990s, the open-access movement emerged, revolutionizing the dissemination of academic knowledge by making online-only, freely accessible journals available to the public.

This shift towards online publishing rapidly became the standard, and by the early 2000s, a

coordinated effort was underway to broaden access to scholarly journal articles that had previously been restricted. This movement broke down long-standing barriers, enabling the widespread availability of cutting-edge, evidence-based practices (Laakso et al., 2011). By making research freely accessible, open access ensures that valuable information reaches those who need it most—the people working directly in communities and on the frontlines to solve challenges and overcome barriers. This democratization of knowledge not only accelerated the application of innovative practices but also empowered communities and CBOs to share their stories, whether of successes or failures, in the hopes that generalizable knowledge could be attained.

In closing, while the immediate demands of community-level work often overshadow the potential benefits of publishing, it is crucial to recognize the transformative power of dissemination. By sharing insights and results from community-based work, we not only validate the efforts of those on the ground but also contribute to a broader, evidence-based knowledge base that can drive policy and process improvements. The open-access movement has further amplified this impact by making research widely available, ensuring that project leaders and decision-makers can benefit from the latest evidence from a variety of settings, populations, and organizations. Embracing the practice of publishing and disseminating community-level work not only enhances the visibility and credibility of these initiatives but also fosters a culture of shared learning and collaboration. This, in turn, can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions to current and future community challenges, ultimately strengthening the bridge between research and real-world application.

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