

What is this guidance?

This learning document has been produced as part of The Role of Social Capital in Urban Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (SoCap) project. It outlines key steps in establishing a community-based research review process (CRP). It is accompanied by a public research brief that provides more information on the need and rationale for CRPs, as well as good practice and key pitfalls to avoid ([link](#)).

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for Concern technical, programming and learning staff, as well as research professionals with whom they engage, seeking to strengthen community ownership and accountability of research projects.

What are CRPs?

CRPs are a form of ethical review that centrally involve the communities with whom research is being carried out. They are part of a broad range of participatory approaches that seek collaboration and partnership with communities instead of engaging in research on or in communities.

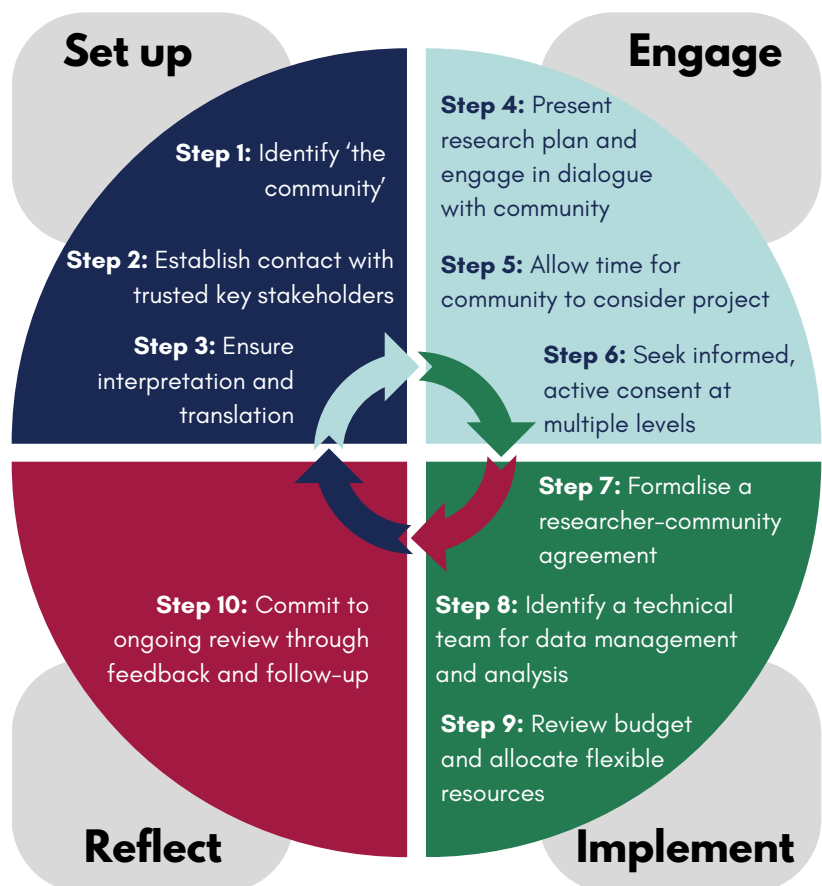
Why are CRPs beneficial?

CRPs can help to 1) ensure community input into research project design, including by redressing frequent imbalances in power between researcher and researched; 2) safeguard community members and minimise harm; 3) promote community ownership of results, ensuring knowledge produced is relevant and useful to the community; 4) recognise and support community expertise; and 5) enhance feasibility.

OVERVIEW

There are 10 steps to supporting the establishment or functioning of a CRP:

1. Identify who 'the community' is;
2. Establish contact with trusted key stakeholders;
3. Ensure interpretation and translation;
4. Present research plan and engage in dialogue with the community;
5. Allow time for the community to consider the project;
6. Seek informed, active consent at community and individual levels;
7. Formalise a researcher-community agreement;
8. Identify a technical team for data management and analysis;
9. Review budget and allocate flexible resources accordingly;
10. Commit to ongoing review through feedback and follow-up.



01 IDENTIFY WHO 'THE COMMUNITY' IS

Identify who is the community who will be involved in the research. Researchers should consider:

1. Place – is the community geographically defined as a village, neighbourhood, or area?
2. People – who makes up the community in terms of key groups or demographics? and
3. Power – who among the intended community are in positions of authority? Who is marginalised, traditionally excluded from decision-making, and/or over-researched? What steps can be taken to ensure community engagement is inclusive and reflective of these dynamics?

02 ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH TRUSTED KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Engage with key stakeholders who have longstanding relationships with identified communities, who are trusted by members of the community, and who have vast contextual knowledge. These may be members of the research team directly, and/or community leaders or representatives with whom the research team or Concern staff have connections.

03 ENSURE INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION

Prior to engaging directly with communities, identify interpreters and translators as required to support project communications. All project materials and dialogues with the community should be facilitated through 1) the community's preferred language and vocabulary; and 2) accessible and appropriate formats that take into account factors such as literacy, culturally appropriate imagery and related considerations. There should be ongoing dialogue and feedback about appropriate and accessible modes of communication and the research team should be open to adapting communication methods accordingly.

04 PRESENT RESEARCH PLAN AND ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Set up regular meetings with community members to discuss key aspects of the project, including the proposed project design, and later, implementation, and findings. Initial engagement with community members should lay out overall research plans, but these should be flexible enough to ensure community perspectives, and potential for innovation through community review, can be integrated. Rather than presenting research in a one-sided way, researchers should be prepared for community leaders or representatives to lead or moderate the dialogue to contribute to a more equitable exchange. Take meeting minutes and maintain a record of what was discussed. Meeting minutes can be recorded via written or audio formats, subject to consent from those involved, and depending on what the community deems as the most appropriate format.

05 ALLOW PLENTY OF TIME FOR THE CRP TO CONSIDER PROJECT SUITABILITY

There should be sufficient time for the community to fully consider the suitability of the proposed project. Before agreeing to continue to the next phase, community members should consider the following questions:

1. Does the proposed research align with the research priorities set by our community?
2. Does the community have the capacity to participate in this research at this time and through the proposed lifetime of the project? For instance, are community resources – time, expertise and inputs – already committed or over-extended in other initiatives or research projects?
3. What is the potential for the proposed project to do harm in the community, and to whom? What is the potential for the proposed project to benefit members of the community, and who would be affected?
4. What do we think should be emphasised in a community research ethics review?
5. How should a community review be different from an institutional review?

06 **SEEK INFORMED, ACTIVE CONSENT AT COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL LEVELS**

Adopt a phased approach to informed consent. This involves obtaining consent from multiple groups on multiple levels at multiple stages, by:

1. Determining who has the authority to give consent on behalf of the community to proceed with the research project within the community, such as community leaders or representatives from across different groups (see points above re: community representatives);
2. Obtaining informed consent from these representatives;
3. Identifying who within the community will directly take part in research (for example, respond to surveys, take part in interviews);
4. Seeking informed consent of these individuals directly prior to commencing research;
5. Continuing to seek consent at both communal and individual levels periodically as the study progresses, and specifically at any points when tools are revised and redeployed.

07 **FORMALISE A RESEARCHER-COMMUNITY AGREEMENT**

Establish a formal agreement between community members and the researchers. The agreement should ensure that everyone involved in the study clearly understands their role, what is expected of them, and why their contributions are relevant and important. While this can be part of general participatory research approaches more widely, an agreement developed through or informed by a CRP process will contain specific ethical dimensions.

The agreement should clearly set out:

- Who is carrying out the study;
- Purpose and objectives of the research;
- Scope of the research – geographic reach, duration, and methods to be employed;
- Parties to the agreement and their responsibilities, including clear role descriptions;
- Details of ethical commitments around i) consent; ii) confidentiality; iii) safeguarding; and iv) do no harm;
- Ethical risks that have been identified in designing the research and how these have been minimised;
- When periodic meetings will take place with the community to provide updates, address questions or concerns, and/or integrate community feedback;
- Details of ownership of study data and how it will be managed;
- How results will be disseminated in an ethical and meaningful way;
- What accountability and dispute resolution processes are in place for all involved;
- Anything else deemed relevant and appropriate by community collaborators.

The format for the agreement should be decided collectively by those involved in the project. For example, it may take the form of a written agreement; regular meetings to establish active, informed and ongoing consent, or mixed formats (i.e. written and oral formats).

Community collaborators should ask: Is the researcher-community agreement fair in terms of benefit sharing, project outcomes, and plans for conducting and disseminating research? Everyone involved in the study should have access to the agreement and should clearly understand its contents.

08 IDENTIFY A TECHNICAL TEAM FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Incorporate guidelines within the research agreement on management, storage, access to, and analysis of research data. Where appropriate, this can be complemented with training for community researchers working with sensitive data. Community collaborators may opt to establish a technical team whose role is to work directly with project data, shaping analysis and findings. In this case, work with community leaders to jointly identify community members for the technical team who will contribute to data management and analysis.

09 REVIEW BUDGET AND ALLOCATE FLEXIBLE RESOURCES ACCORDINGLY

To the extent possible, the research team should adopt a budget with sufficient flexibility to accommodate community-identified requirements, such as expenses including hiring community members as staff, and providing stipends or reimbursement for costs of participation. This might involve budgeting for stipend, travel, food, childcare, among other expenses, as deemed culturally and contextually appropriate by community collaborators. Community members should be involved in setting up the project budget.

10 COMMIT TO ONGOING REVIEW THROUGH FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

Researchers should plan for community participation at each stage of research. This should involve incorporating opportunities for broad community input; regular communication, dialogue, and meetings; mutual accountability; transparency; and opportunities for follow-up. For long-term projects, scheduling standing 'ethical audits' to collectively review ethical risks, existing strategies for managing these, and adherence to ethical commitments, should be part of the structured timeline of the project. Wherever possible, follow-up should extend beyond the life cycle of the project.

CRP members should consider whether the proposed research aligns with the research priorities set by their community. Who is likely to benefit, and what is the potential for harm? Members should ask: Is the researcher-community agreement fair in terms of benefit sharing, project outcomes, and plans for conducting and disseminating research?

OVERVIEW OF A CRP PROCESS IN PRACTICE

Jessica Hsu and Robi Louino co-lead the implementation of the SoCap project in Cité Soleil, Haiti together with Gwoup Konbit. Gwoup Konbit ([link](#)) is a Haitian social movement and platform facilitating connections, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange among leaders and groups that espouse the principles of konbit. Konbit is a traditional, historical form of collective labor rooted in mutual aid and solidarity – a powerful concept in Haiti that Gwoup Konbit has tapped into in building its movement.

In the early stages of the SoCap project, the team established a CRP process to ensure community priorities, concerns, rights and protections were at the centre of project research ethics. Below, they describe the process of setting up a CRP in Cité Soleil as part of the SoCap project:

Q: Can you describe Gwoup Konbit's background and how that influenced the setup of a CRP as part of this project?

Gwoup Konbit is already made up of young social leaders. It's a social movement. This is the foundation to understanding – who is who, what are the local realities, who are the leaders? Gwoup Konbit itself was already, even before this process, working to understand and support the strength of the community. It's been about five years that we are elaborating 'Konbit' as a community development tool, so that really put us in a place where we were ready to really shift to try new approaches. One of the other values of Gwoup Konbit is interdependence. We look at the process as an interdependence – the research team, the CRP, the other partners – we are all interdependent.

Q: Can you describe the membership of the CRP for the SoCap project?

There are about 20 people on the CRP, 6 or 7 of them are women. We make sure we have leaders from all areas. They are leaders who already have experience. For instance, one member is a representative of the local authority; another is a pastor; the rest are leaders of organisations in their communities.

Q: How important was it to take account of power relations and dynamics within the community when setting up the CRP?

It was our first priority. Cité Soleil is a tiny place and very complex. Every block is separated by some invisible barrier that you can't see, but it is there. We've got to involve someone from each community, and take each community in their own context. We built the CRP, and even our technical team, around different tensions and balance – whether it's language or money, etc. We are always asking ourselves: how do we navigate those imbalances of access, power, and whatever it might be.

Q: What kind of input did the CRP provide when it came to developing, testing and approving research plans and tools?

When we were presenting and testing the questions to the CRP, and it's a group of people that really trust each other. What was so interesting was the responses – CRP members gave some performance around what they anticipated the challenges would be in the communities themselves, what they knew we would come across as we ask the questions. We would test questions and they would challenge us, saying things like – *What did you bring for me today? How is this going to be useful for my community?* They were so important. It prepared us – when you get to the community, people will ask this kind of question. They also insisted on promises. We've got some promises we have to keep – for instance, the research paper will come back to them, it's a promise. It will be in Kreyol, it's a promise. This is not just a promise, it's a reality: they are the owner of the research.

FURTHER READING

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Cross, J.E., Pickering, K. and Hickey, M. (2015) 'Community-Based Participatory Research, Ethics, and Institutional Review Boards: Untying a Gordian Knot', *Critical Sociology*, 41(7-8), pp. 1007-1026. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513512696>.

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Kwan, C. and Walsh, C.A. (2018) 'Ethical Issues in Conducting Community-Based Participatory Research: A Narrative Review of the Literature', *The Qualitative Report*, 23(2), pp. 369-386.

Shore, N. (2007) 'Community-Based Participatory Research and the Ethics Review Process', *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal*, 2(1), pp. 31-41. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2007.2.1.31>.

About the SoCap Project

The Role of Social Capital in Urban Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (SoCap) project is a three-year research project funded by Irish Aid and undertaken in partnership with Concern Worldwide. It systematically analyses the interactions between social capital, resilience, the urban environment, and conflict and fragility among marginalised urban populations in Haiti, Somalia and Somaliland.

This mixed-methods research aims to understand how pathways that translate social capital to resilience among marginalised urban groups are both fostered and thwarted, to identify practical leverage points for operational and policy actors.

The research team includes Jessica Hsu and Robillard Louino, Gwoup Konbit, Haiti; Manar Zaki and Brenton Peterson, Consilient, Somalia and Somaliland; Dr Kelsey Gleason, University of Vermont; Dr Ronak Patel; and Dr Caitriona Dowd and Dr Kelsey Rhude, University College Dublin.

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For more about the SoCap project, please visit

<https://www.concern.net/knowledge-hub>

