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COMMUNITY REVIEWER TRAINING PROGRAM TOOLKIT

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Acknowledgments

We wish to extend special thanks to the multiple community reviewers that participated in our different institutional (or CTSA hub) review processes. Their contributions provided key guidance included within this toolkit.

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Community Reviewer Training Program (CRTP) Background

a. Building trust between researchers and underrepresented communities is crucial to improving research relevance, participation, and outcomes (National Institutes of Health, 2011). Many communities who are underrepresented in research and burdened by health disparities feel intimidated by research, lack trust in researchers and/or the research process (due in part to historical injustices), and lack control over their access to opportunities to partner or participate in research (Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2006).
b. The absence of community input in the grant review process contributes to the gap between academic researchers and community partners/representatives. This gap can be remedied at the CTSA level as a model for other granting organizations. In a 2011 survey, only 19% of CTSA institutions reported having community representatives advise CTSA core programs (Wilkins et al., 2013). Additionally, only 11% reported inclusion of a community representative on the CTSA leadership team. This finding highlighted the under-utilization of community representatives from physical and social environments where research is taking place (Paberzs et al., 2014). This overall lack of representation makes community voices critically important in the grant review process (Wilkins et al, 2013).
c. In order to overcome barriers that institutions face in engaging community representatives in the grant review process, the CTSA Community Reviewer Training Program Consortium formed to implement this training program across 5 CTSA hubs: University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, University of Southern California, Ohio State University, Virginia Commonwealth University and University of California, Irvine. In total, this consortium trained 105 community members in 2019-2020 to participate in the grant review process. This manual serves as a guide to implementing the Community Reviewer Training Program at your institution and includes our lessons learned.

Successes and Challenges

1. Successes
    a. Experiences of the Community Reviewers
        i. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from this cohort of Community Reviewers about their experience in this program. Many Community Reviewers appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the process of selecting research that would potentially impact their community.
    b. Impact on the Review Process
        i. Community Reviewers provided relevant feedback in their grants reviews and in several cases, their perspectives changed the direction of the conversation in our study section meetings. For example, one pilot application proposed a home-base intervention that would require internet access in order to participate. The Community Reviewer pointed out that not everyone in their community had access to the internet and that this would greatly limit individual's ability to participate. The study team incorporated this feedback in the resubmission of the proposal and were funded after including internet hotspots in the budget to address the issue of internet access.

2. Challenges
    a. Technical Scientific Proposals
        i. Community Reviewers were tasked with providing feedback on very technical pilot grant proposals on a wide range of research topics. This presented a challenge to our Community Reviewers, as without scientific expertise, the proposals can be difficult to interpret. We required that all applicants submit lay summaries of their proposals to address this challenge. Additionally, we reminded our Community Reviewers that they serve a unique purpose in the review process that supplements that of the Scientific Reviewers.
    b. Review Criteria
        i. In this first iteration of the CRTP, several hubs in the consortium had their Community and Scientific Reviewers complete the same review template. Through this process, we learned that the review forms used by our Scientific Reviewers, were not appropriate for our Community Reviewers. We recommend focusing the review forms for Community Reviewers on issues of community impact and feasibility.

Preparing Scientific Reviewers/Investigators

a. Community members will be a new addition to the grant review process for many Scientific Reviewers/Investigators. To make things run more smoothly, we recommend that you clearly communicate the role of Community Reviewers to investigators, which you may accomplish by including language about Community Reviewers in the call for proposals, as well as all communication to the Scientific Reviewers.

Considerations for Virtual Trainings & Meetings

a. While originally planned as a fully in-person program, the COVID-19 pandemic forced two of our sites to quickly pivot to hosting virtual meetings. This experience yielded a few important things to be mindful of when planning to host a virtual training program and study section meeting.

i. Technical Considerations

1. Virtual meeting platforms

Participants may not have extensive experience using virtual meeting platforms. We recommend providing explicit instructions on use of the virtual platform in advance of meetings and include time for participants to familiarize themselves with the platform.

Considerations for Virtual Trainings & Meetings

2. Access to computers or the internet

Some Community Reviewers may not have access to a computer or stable internet to complete online training and reviews. Consider the population you are working with and plan to make necessary accommodations for those who may need access to resources to participate in this process.

3. Review platforms

Digital review platforms are useful tools that allow us to ease some of the administrative burden associated with grant review processes. Much like virtual meeting platforms, Community Reviewers likely have little experience using review forms or portals. In our experience, it is important to provide detailed tutorials on using the review platform. Additionally, it is important to be flexible in allowing Community Reviewers to submit their reviews using different methods. For example, our cohort included several individuals who had difficulties with our review platforms and needed to type their reviews into a word document.

4. Printed training materials

We found that our Community Reviewers preferred to receive physical copies of training materials. If you will implement an online training session, consider mailing training materials to reviewers to create a better training experience.

ii. Interpersonal Connections

1. Many Community Reviewers expressed that connecting with investigators and other community members motivated them to participate in this program. Virtual meeting platforms are not optimal settings to create interpersonal connections. In order to address this issue, program staff will need to build in time and activities to facilitate these connections. For example, the Ohio State University program staff hosted a virtual “meet and greet” between their Community and Scientific Reviewers. This meeting served the dual purpose of providing opportunity for interpersonal connection and allowing participants to practice using their virtual meeting platform. Additionally, you may consider scheduling icebreaker activities or small group breakout sessions.

Community Reviewer Time Commitment and Compensation

a. We cannot overstate the importance of ensuring that Community Reviewers are appropriately compensated for their time and effort given in this program. In our experience, each participant completed 3-4 hours of training, spent an additional 3-4 hours completing their review of the pilot proposal(s), attended our study section/review committee meeting, and completed assessment surveys throughout the process.

The pay schedule our program used was as follows:
$100 for completing training
$100 for submitting their review
$100 for attending the review committee meeting

b. Community Reviewers received the above compensation for completing each portion of the program and the corresponding assessment surveys.

Documents Included in this Toolkit

Toolkit - select the hyperlinks to view the documents included in this toolkit.

a. Train the Trainer Powerpoint Presentation

Please note that the slides are set up with individual voice-overs. Click the green audio icons in the top left of each slide to hear the accompanying audio.

b. Train the Trainer (TTT) Transcript

c. Community Reviewer Training Session 1 slides

d. Community Reviewer Training Session 2 slides

e. Sample Communications Document

f. Sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

g. Glossary of Research Terms

h. Pieces of a Pilot Application

i. Sample Language for Request for Applications (RFA)

Concerning Community Reviewers

i. In addition to scientific reviews, full applications will also undergo review by a community member. A goal of [institution]is to integrate Community Reviewer perspectives into shaping our research agenda and be able to communicate to the local public about work funded [institution]. Community Reviewers will read, score and discuss the applications. The full application process now includes preparation of a two-page lay summary of the application's content with reduced jargon to promote readability at a nonscientific high school reading level, or applicants may submit a five minute promotional video which explains your project to a general/lay audience.

j. Lay Video Instructions

References

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