



Building Community Partnerships: The Role of Schools of Public Health

Meredith Manze¹ · Andrew Maroko² · Marilyn Aguirre-Molina¹ · P. Christopher Palmedo¹

Published online: 27 October 2018
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2018

There is an increased recognition of the role that schools of public health can play as a resource to the communities in which they reside. One example of this comes from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the accrediting body for schools of public health, and its new guidelines for schools to increase collaboration with community stakeholders [1]. It is incumbent upon schools of public health to function as a resource to their neighboring community. This relationship can be beneficial for faculty, students, community organizations, and residents alike.

Schools of public health are often situated in or near low-resourced communities. With some exceptions, the typical ‘relationship’ between schools of public health and communities tends to be unilateral, in which schools tap these communities for research, but often without returning with solutions or funds to sustain short or long-term health initiatives. This contributes to the phenomenon of over-researched populations and resulting ‘research fatigue,’ which are common among such communities [2]. This lack of reciprocity has likely contributed to communities’ reservations to work with schools [3].

In 2015, the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (SPH) was founded and established residence in Central Harlem, New York City. The mission of the school is “to provide a collaborative and accessible environment for excellence in education, research, and service in public health, to promote and sustain healthier populations in New York City and around the world, and to shape policy and practice in public health

for all [4].” To that end, and guided by the principles of public health practice, [5] faculty in the Department of Community Health and Social Sciences (MGM, MAM) invited neighboring organizations to visit the school in an effort to establish collaborative relationships and improve engagement with our community and its residents. Our main aim was to initiate a dialogue with community-based organizations (CBOs) in Central Harlem to explore opportunities for collaboration.

CBOs provide invaluable resources to community residents through health and social services. By supporting CBOs, schools of public health are thus promoting community health and contributing toward the reduction of health inequities. We identified four CBOs in our community whose mission aligns with the school’s research and service priority areas (sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, food policy, and HIV/AIDS), to participate in a panel discussion open to the public. The convening, dubbed “Academia in Action: Serving the Harlem Community,” took place in April 2017. CBO representatives shared their vision for the role of our school and how this reciprocal relationship could thrive. The collective process envisioned CUNY SPH as:

- Thought partners, providing intellectual input and identifying new opportunities for their work
- Community conveners, equipped to assist local community organizations to meet one another and establish collaborations amongst themselves
- Research disseminators, able to widely communicate the results of community engaged research

Ideas for concrete collaborations included:

- Partnering on research including abstract submissions, conference attendance, analysis, manuscript development, and grant proposals

✉ Meredith Manze
Meredith.manze@sph.cuny.edu

¹ Department of Community Health and Social Sciences, School of Public Health, City University of New York (CUNY), New York, NY 10027, USA

² Department of Environmental, Occupational, and Geospatial Health Sciences, City University of New York (CUNY) School of Public Health, New York, NY, USA

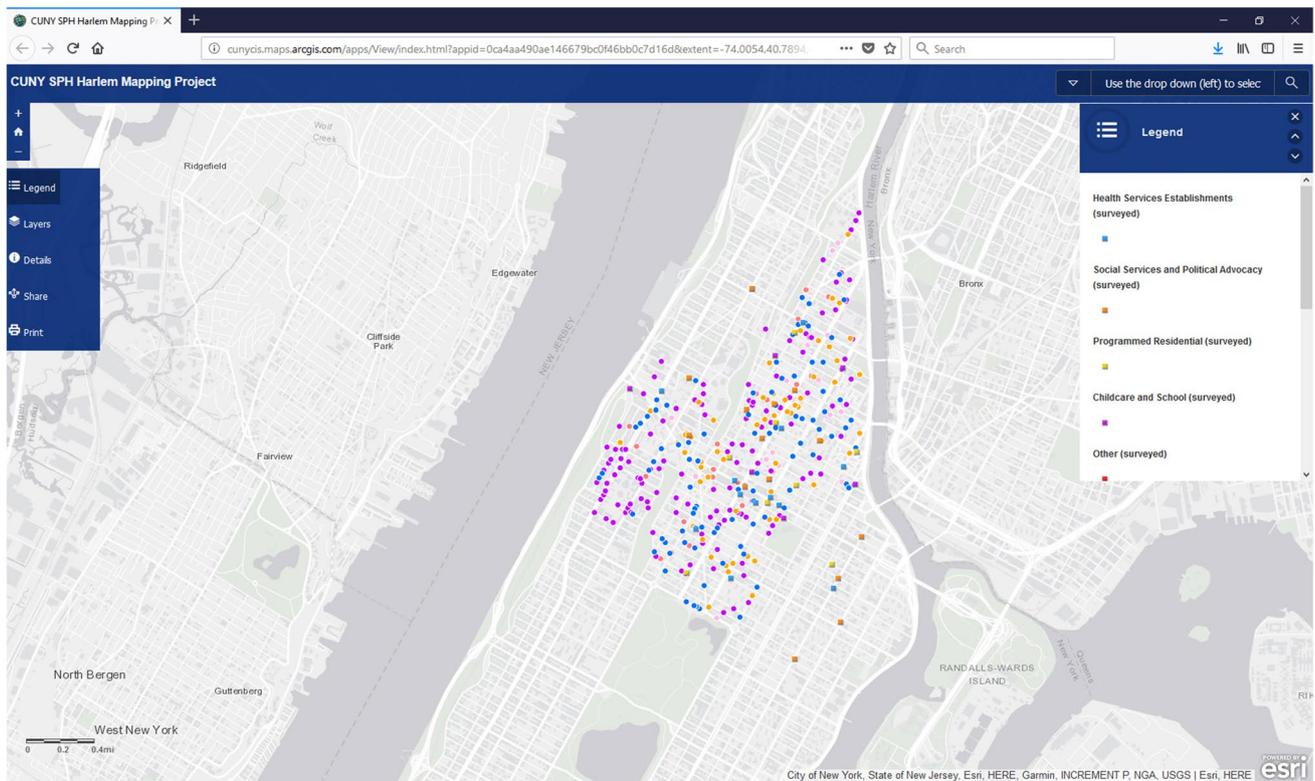


Fig. 1 Screen shot of open-access online community health resource map

- Connecting graduate students to CBOs for fieldwork opportunities

During the year since this convening, CUNY SPH has: connected students to CBOs for their fieldwork internships; collaborated with CBOs for MPH students to write grant proposals on their behalf as part of our coursework; created an online resource of health and social services and programs in Central Harlem (<http://arcg.is/0H0DXi>; Fig. 1); and partnered on a grant application where faculty can serve as program evaluators. The institutionalization of our working relationships was, in some cases, established by way of memorandum of agreements between the school and organizations.

Through a brief convening with CBOs, we established a foundation for future collaborations that benefit both the school and our neighboring CBOs, to serve our community's residents and promote health.

Our experience shows that collaboration between schools of public health and their local communities is a relatively easy process to start, despite the recognition that these relationships have the potential to grow infinitely more complex and meaningful. Intentionally establishing strong relationships with community organizations provides new and meaningful opportunities for faculty research, community service, student

engagement, fulfilling the school's mission, CBO needs, as well as our shared community's health and well-being.

Funding The Harlem Mapping Project, borne out of the panel with community-based organizations, was funded by the CUNY School of Public Health.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

1. Council on Education for Public Health. (2016). *Accreditation criteria: Schools of public health and public health programs*.
2. Clark, T. (2008). 'We're over-researched here!' exploring accounts of research fatigue within qualitative research engagements. *Sociology*, 42(5), 953–970.
3. Emmel, N., Hughes, K., Greenhalgh, J., & Sales, A. (2007). Accessing socially excluded people—Trust and the Gatekeeper in the researcher-participant relationship. *Sociological Research Online*. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1512>.
4. CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy: About. (2018). Retrieved January 13, 2018 from <http://sph.cuny.edu/about/>.
5. Public Health Leadership Society. (2002). *Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health*, Version 2.2.