

Career Strategies for Victim Researchers in Academic Settings

Finding your research identity

Victim researchers represent many professional disciplines and study various forms of victimization. In academic settings, victimization can be either a primary or secondary focus of your work, and you may be interested in more traditional, scientific research or in community-engaged research. Establishing a clear identity for your work can help you make decisions as you forge a meaningful career path.

Traditional research has long been the “gold standard” for publication, promotion, and tenure in academia. These approaches use rigorous methods and complex statistical analysis to control for extraneous influences on findings. However, sometimes these approaches can restrict the applicability of findings to “real world” community settings. The number of controls applied can sometimes limit the ability to generalize findings to diverse populations and the technical language often used to report such research can make it difficult to see implications for practice.

Community-based research is increasingly recognized for the practical, “real world” value it can provide. Community-engaged victim research involves partnering with a specific community to conduct studies relevant to its victimization needs that reflect the real-life experiences of practitioners and their clients. Done right, community engagement embraces a mutual respect between researchers and practitioners of the values, strategies, and actions affecting a community’s well-being (Michener et al., 2012).

Regardless of where you fall on the continuum between traditional and community-based research, you can have an impact on practice and the lives of people who experience victimization. However, community-engaged researchers at academic institutions sometimes struggle to receive recognition equal to traditional researchers. For that reason, this Quick Guide focuses on concerns of community-engaged researchers in academic settings.

Assessing your professional home

Where you work can affect the accessibility and ease of doing community-engaged research. Academic institutions vary in their support for community-engaged research. Many are embracing the opportunity to be seen as a resource for their community, setting up offices to promote such work and revising tenure and promotion guidelines to recognize community-engaged research. Others still strongly favor traditional research over community-engagement. While such settings may be discouraging, there are steps researchers can take to maximize opportunities for a successful career.

Evaluate the climate for community-engaged research in your current or potential workplace using the questions to the right. The following sections offer strategies to begin or strengthen community-engaged victim research that can be tailored based on the level of support your institution offers.

Institutional Assessment Checklist

- Does my institution have an office to support community-engaged research?
- How many other researchers here do community-engaged work?
- Are community-engaged researchers highlighted and valued here?
- Does my institution have a positive reputation in the local community?
- Is community-engaged research reflected in promotion and tenure policies and/or guidelines?

Planning a successful, long-term career

Practice-oriented research can be deeply meaningful and rewarding. You will have opportunities to make a difference in the lives of those facing significant barriers, promote more responsive social systems to help meet victims' needs, and potentially prevent future victimizations.

1. **Align your work with the most pressing needs in your community.** Invest time in identifying research needs in collaboration with community partners so that this understanding can guide your research priorities.
2. **Increase your comfort with practice-relevant research and dissemination methods.** Embrace the complexity of research in the “real world” and consider how different methodological strategies can be combined to maximize the scope of your research. Beyond research journal publications, researchers can tailor products for different audiences. Community-engaged research can be shared directly with practitioners and the community via blogs, white papers, community briefings, brown bags, social or traditional media, and practice or policy reports.
3. **Continually grow your skills and knowledge to advance your community-engaged research.** Learn from the expertise of your community partners and the populations they serve. Do not be afraid to set your own expertise aside and challenge the limits of your knowledge.
4. **Document indicators of the quality of your work.** Questions regarding the quality of community-engaged research can be a barrier to achieving promotion and tenure. Its quality can be demonstrated by clearly defined goals for activities, the rigor of methods used, the meaningfulness of results, effective presentation of results, and the extent to which the work reflects disciplinary expertise.
5. **Be intentional about timing your community-engaged research for different stages of your career.** Envision the long-term difference you want to achieve in your career and align your current work with that vision. Unless your university values and rewards community-engaged scholarship, you may decide to delay or minimize involvement in this approach before achieving tenure. Or, you may do community-engaged work on a smaller scale pre-tenure to lay the groundwork to expand upon later.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TENURE

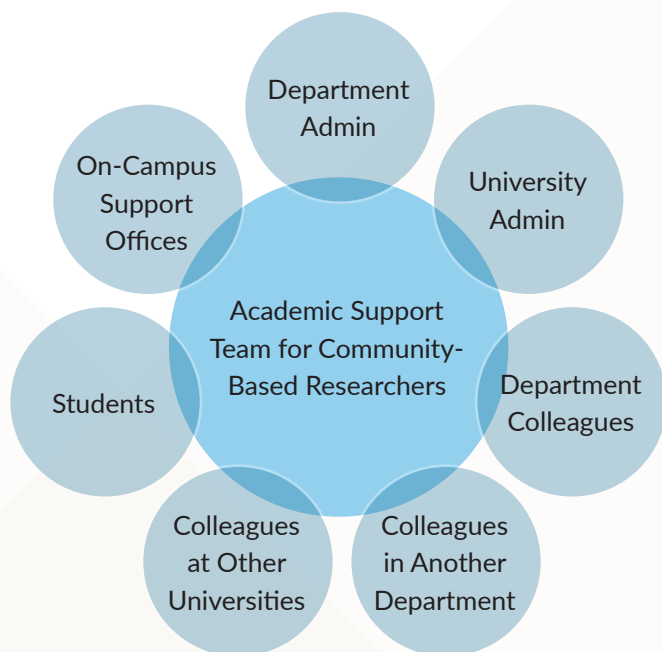
Tenure may be a critical step for university-based researchers. Pursuing tenure may require some short-term sacrifices in the amount of time you have for community-engagement, but the added job security may allow you to do more innovative and practice-focused research in the future and under less deadline pressure.

Pre-tenured faculty may face pressure to publish in traditional peer-reviewed journals. You can try to balance community-engaged research with work meant for more academic publications. This can help show your department that you can produce high-tier, disciplinary publications, while still building a record of in community-engaged scholarship.

It is important to know if and how community-engaged work is included in decisions and guidelines in your department and university. Be sure to connect with more experienced, community-engaged research faculty to learn how they framed their work as they navigated the promotion and tenure processes.

Developing your support team

Relationships are at the core of community-engaged research, and your success largely depends on how you manage them. Relationships with community partners and practitioners are critically important, but you should also build relationships at all levels within academic institutions. With a strong team, your research can be more effective, innovative, and practice-relevant.



1. Seek **out colleagues who also embrace community-engaged research.** Collaborate with and support colleagues in other departments and universities, even if your interests do not align exactly. Search university websites, seek mentors, ask for recommendations, and network at meetings. Some universities are even creating networks of community-engaged researchers to facilitate these partnerships.
2. **Open yourself to new collaborative relationships and partnerships.** Victim research is inherently interdisciplinary. Visit [research support websites](#) and support offices on campus to locate potential funding opportunities, identify colleagues with similar interests, and relate your work to other initiatives—both on campus and in the community.
3. **Advocate for greater recognition and value for community-engaged research.** Work with department and university administrators to support the inclusion of community-engaged research in your university's promotion and tenure policies and procedures. It is also valuable to educate departmental colleagues who are involved in promotion and tenure reviews and encourage their formal consideration of this work.

4. **Educate university leaders about the benefits of community-engaged scholarship.** Help departmental and university administrators understand the conceptual and methodological value of this work and how it can benefit the university. Their priorities may include supporting student learning, generating external funding, fostering relationships across departments, and showing a commitment to bettering the local community. While the level of collegial support can vary among departments, you can demonstrate the nature and benefits of community research and your unique skills in this field to departmental colleagues. You can even directly engage them by connecting them with a practitioner partner or involving them in data analysis.
5. **Support newer community-engaged researchers later in your career.** Help colleagues pursue tenure and identify opportunities to collaborate on research. Offer students meaningful learning experiences in your research, such as by connecting them to internships with community partners and involving them in data collection or writing research papers.

Victim researchers interested in using their academic careers to make a difference can find a lot of opportunities in community-engaged research. By taking steps to integrate research and practice throughout your career, you can have a meaningful impact on the victim research field and community around you!

Additional resources



Visit [CVR's website](#) for tips on how researchers and practitioners can work together, including this tip sheet: Murray, C. (2018). [Building successful victim researcher and practitioner collaborations](#). Washington, DC: Center for Victim Research.



Davidson, M. M., & Bowen, N. (2011). [Academia meets community agency: How to foster positive collaboration in domestic violence and sexual assault work](#). *Journal of Family Violence*, 26, 309-318.



Mouradian, V. E., Mechanic, M. B., & Williams, L. M. (2001). [Recommendations for establishing and maintaining successful researcher-practitioner collaborations](#). Wellesley, MA: National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center.