

What is Research and How Can Research Benefit Your Organization?

Shao-Chee Sim, PhD

Director of Research and Evaluation

Charles B. Wang Community Health Center



CHARLES B. WANG
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER
王嘉廉社區醫療中心



What is research to you?

When you hear
“Research,”
what comes to mind?

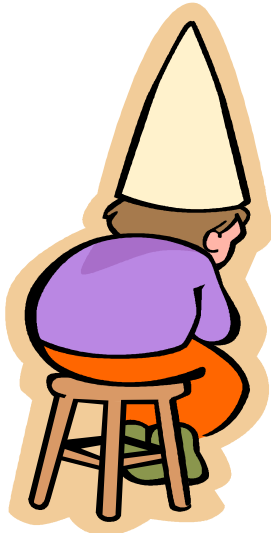


We define “research” as

- Research entails systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, services, organizations and communities served by nonprofit organizations.
- Research activities, which may include needs assessment, quality improvement, monitoring, and evaluation, are undertaken to inform organizational direction, develop programs and refine services.



Common reactions to the term “research”



Common Sentiments about Research

- I don't speak the research language
- I am not a numbers person
- It can only be carried out by PhDs and social scientists
- It costs a lot of monies and time
- It means reading lengthy reports
- It will distract from real work
- The research findings will be ignored



Barriers to Conducting Research

- Limited resources (time, money and/or expertise)
- Misunderstanding and anxiety over the research process and terms like hypothesis, methodology, outcomes
- Past research efforts that have been burdensome, critical and problem-centered
- Past research efforts that have been “imposed” on organizations from the outside (i.e. funders)
- Delay in producing research reports
- Existing tension between producing useful knowledge vs. scientific knowledge (findings may not be timely)

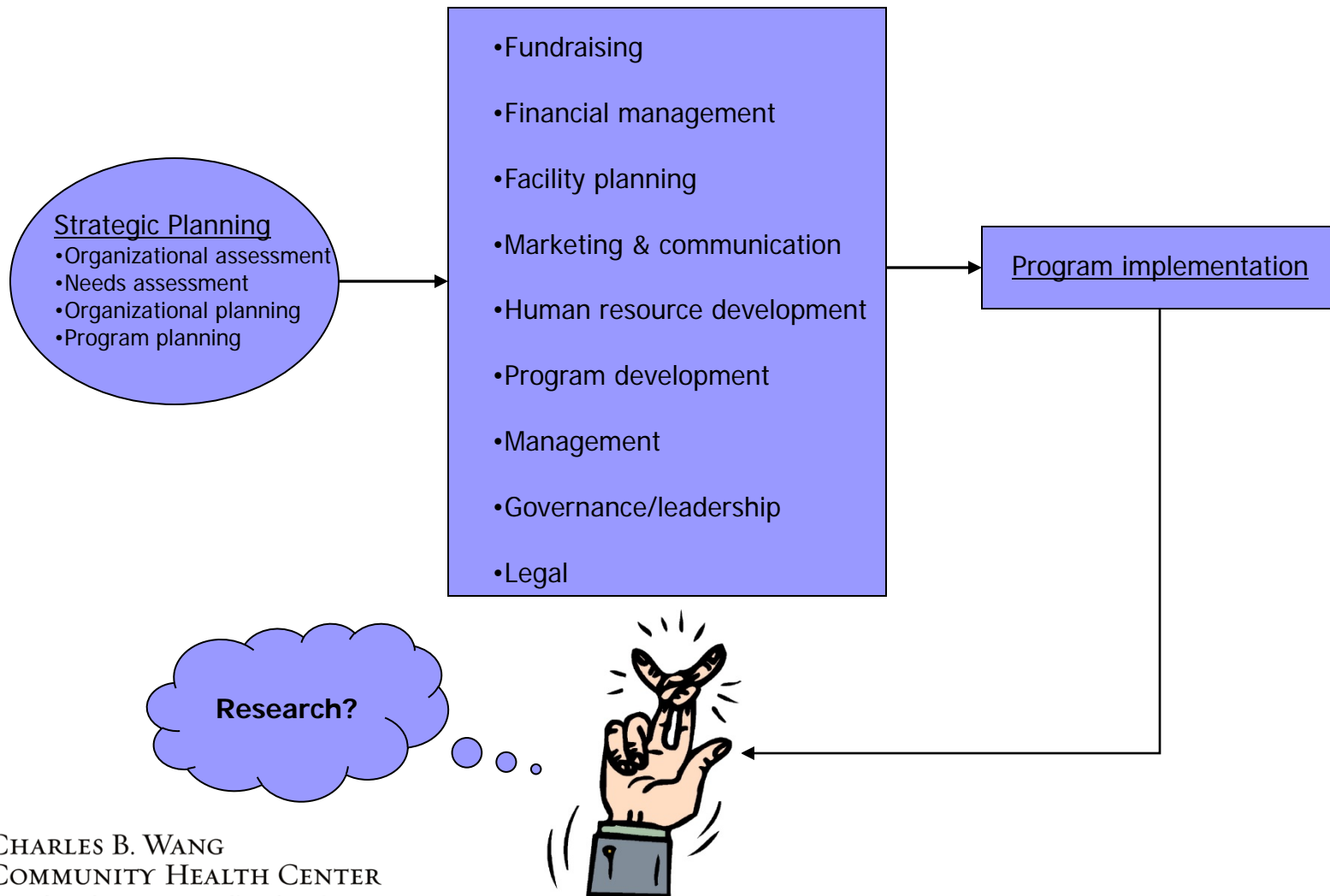


Overcoming Organizational Barriers

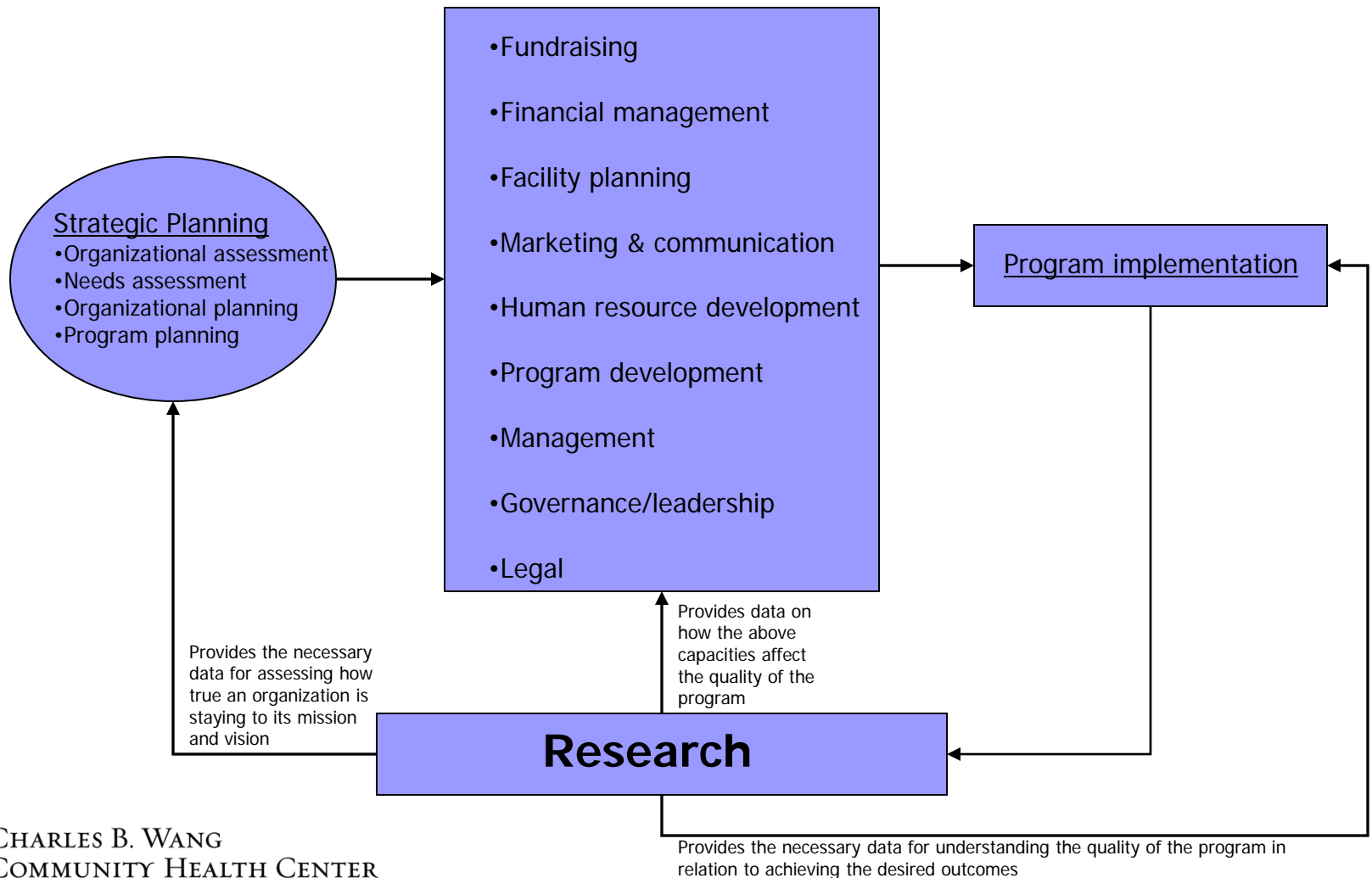
- Senior staff and the board should agree on the purpose of the research, the public sharing of these purposes and adherence to the purposes and scope of the research
- Invest energy in building buy-in for the value of the research
- Define roles and tasks early in the process
- Leaders should implement mechanisms for regular reporting, sharing of findings, updates and airing of concerns



The Role Research Typically Plays in A Typical Nonprofit Organization



The Role Research Should Play in A Nonprofit Organization



Benefits of Having Timely and Meaningful Research Data

- Better understand evolving community needs
- Inform program development and refinement
- Measure the outcomes of programs and account for use of resources
- Promote organizational learning
- Create new understanding about what works and what does not
- Strengthen the case for program funding
- Articulate context, rationale and benefits of programs to communicate with stakeholders, boards, funders, audiences



Building Infrastructure to Carry out Research Projects


- Secure support and commitment from organizational leaders
- Develop policies and procedures
- Select and establish partnerships with universities and/or hospitals
- Obtain external funding
- Determine research capacity
 - Develop or recruit researchers
- Use research to inform day-to-day performance
- Obtain access to scientific literature and qualitative and quantitative software programs

How research evolved at CBWCHC:

- Support from Chief Medical Officer and Chief Executive Officer
- Funding from hospitals, government, foundations and other agencies to carry out research projects relevant to the Chinese American population
 - Chinese American Elderly Depression Study (1999-2003)
 - Breast and Prostate Cancer Prevention and Screening Study (2000-2001)
- Partnership with CSAAH
- Collaboration with AAPCHO
- Built on early successes
- Research staff had the necessary academic credentials and CBW staff were familiar with the community



Common Steps In Planning Any Research Effort

1. Determine research objective, key questions and audiences
2. Identify information sources to address key research questions 
3. Decide on data collection approaches, including research design, methodology and tools
4. Develop a data analysis plan
5. Develop a dissemination plan to share the research findings
6. Determine staff resources (internal vs. external) to undertake the research activities within a concrete timeframe.



Key Considerations for Employing External Resources to Undertake Research Activities

Examples of external researchers are consultants, university staff, graduate students or volunteers.

- Expertise
- Impartiality
- Cost
- Time



Tradeoffs between using internal resources vs. external resources (1)

Advantages:

Internal Team Member

- **Timely** – Immediately the program/project has information that begins informing program/policy decisions.
- **Buy-In** – Those involved have the opportunity to have their voices heard, and may want to contribute to the research.
- **“Insider” perspective** – An “in-house” researcher may be more familiar with the staff, community issues, and resources associated with the project/program.

Disadvantages:

Internal Team Member

- **Time consuming** – Internal resources involve staff time that may draw on limited personnel resources.
- **Bias** – There may be a perception of bias if the internal staff is “too close” to the subject matter; this may result in risking the credibility of the research findings and hindering its use.



Tradeoffs between using internal resources vs. external resources (2)

Advantages:

External Researcher

- **Perspective** – An external researcher may provide a view of the program that is considered more objective by the intended users.
- **Credible** – An external research may be perceived as having credibility for people outside of the program/project (funding partners, stakeholders, etc.)
- **Expertise** – An external researcher or team may possess certain evaluation research skills and knowledge that the internal staff may not. S/he may also have exposure to a wider range of issues, methods and practices that would be useful to incorporate.

Disadvantages:

External Researcher

- **Cost** – External research can be more costly than internal evaluations.
- **Time** – It maybe difficult to manage a project conducted by an external researcher.
- **Expertise** – It may be difficult to find a researcher who understands the region or programming area.



Case studies from CBWCHC

- Strategic Planning
- Needs Assessment
 - Geriatric Service Grant
 - Chinatown JUMP Physical Activity Grant
- Quality Improvement
- Evaluation
 - Community Genetics Education Network Project
 - Front-line Health Worker Training



Strategic Planning

- Issue: There is a growing and shifting Chinese American and Asian American population in New York City. These residents still receive varying levels of care.
- Objective: To identify areas of New York City with a large population of Chinese Americans and to provide an overview of the Asian American population data to inform strategic planning discussions
- Data collection approach: Extract Census and American Community Survey (ACS) data from Factfinder.census.gov and Infoshare.org pertaining to the Chinese American and Asian American population in New York City. Types of data collected include total population, foreign-born population, number of people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), poverty level
- Data analysis: Analyzed data at the city, neighborhood and borough level; analyze by age categories and by gender
- Findings: As of 2008, approximately 75% of the Asian population in New York City is under the age of 50. However, from 2000-2008, Chinatown-Lower East Side experienced a 19% decrease in the Asian 17 years old and under population. The borough of Queens had an overall increase of 176% for Asian individuals over 65 years old and the borough of Brooklyn had a 63% increase in the 65 year and older Asian population.



Needs Assessment to inform development of Geriatric Services

- Issue: There is a growing Chinese American elderly population in New York City. Many Chinese American seniors have difficulty understanding and navigating New York City's complex health care delivery system.
- Funding Source: United Hospital Fund, Fan Fox and Leslie Samuels Foundation
- Objective: To identify gaps in health services for Chinese American elderly in New York City
- Data collection approach: Conducted literature review, secondary data analysis (Census data and chart review), interviews with service providers, focus groups, convened an advisory committee to guide the needs assessment
- Findings: Needs assessment activities helped to identify service gaps, including: a need for linguistically and culturally appropriate services; a need for patient education and case management services; a need for mental health services; and a need for affordable services for uninsured and underinsured patients. A patient-centered medical home model was implemented at CBWCHC as a result of the needs assessment.



Needs Assessment to Inform Development of Physical Activities for Youth

- Issue: There is an alarming trend of childhood obesity amongst Asian American children and youth. A 2004 chart review from CBWCHC found that the combined overweight and obesity prevalence rate of Pediatrics patients of Chinese descent was 25% (Au et al., 2009). The prevalence rate among U.S. born boys aged 6-12 years was as high as 40%.
- Funding Source: New York State Department of Health
- Objective: To identify barriers to participation in physical activities in order to inform programming targeted towards youth and families living in Manhattan Chinatown
- Data collection approach: Administered surveys in the Pediatrics waiting room, conduct focus groups with youth and parents
- Findings: Awareness of physical activity is high, however major barriers exist to engage in routine physical activity. Barriers include lack of knowledge on accessing resources, costs of specific activities, parental concerns over neighborhood safety, and competing activities at school and on the computer. Needs assessment findings were used to inform program development. Currently, the Pediatrics department has implemented several intergenerational programs, including a walking group, yoga classes for children and elders and basketball clinics for youth.



Quality Improvement

- Issue: Providing high quality to our patient population is always a top priority.
- Objective: To understand patients' levels of satisfaction with the health center's services and identify areas for improvement within CBWCHC
- Data collection approach: Implemented a patient satisfaction survey to measure 4 key domains: ease of getting care, health center facilities, waiting time, and staff (Patient Service Representatives, nurses/medical assistants and providers). The survey was administered to patients in the waiting room prior to their doctor's visit.
- Findings: Data from the patient satisfaction surveys suggest that patients are generally highly satisfied with their experiences at CBWCHC and that CBWCHC continues to make improvements on all measures. Although waiting time has improved, almost half of the patients who responded to the survey would like to see more improvement to the waiting time.



Evaluation of Community Genetics Education Network (CGEN)

- Issue: Chinese immigrants face multiple barriers to accessing genetic counseling as a result of financial, cultural and linguistic barriers.
- Funding Source: HRSA & March of Dimes Foundation
- Objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of genetic education pre-counseling workshops for pregnant women and women of child-bearing age
- Data Collection Approach: Quasi-experimental design; pre-post survey data was collected from intervention and control group participants on knowledge, attitudes and self-efficacy related to genetic counseling
- Findings: In the intervention group, patients were found to have made statistically significant improvements in their knowledge, attitude and self-efficacy toward prenatal genetic testing and counseling compared to the control group. A genetic education toolkit was developed and best practices were shared with other community health centers that serve Asian American populations.

遺傳的基礎知識
Basic Genetic Information

- 什麼是基因?
基因是有遺傳功能的DNA，它們存在於染色體內。
- 什麼是染色體?
染色體是人體細胞內攜帶基因的遺傳物質，共有46條，配成23對。
- What are genes?
Genes are found within the chromosome which contains genetic DNA.
- What are chromosomes?
Structures that carry genes inside cells. We have 46 chromosomes (arranged in 23 pairs).

The diagram illustrates the hierarchy of genetic information. At the top is a cell (細胞) containing a nucleus (細胞核). Inside the nucleus is a chromosome (染色體). A chromosome is composed of DNA (DNA), which is shown as a double helix structure. The DNA is labeled as 去氧核糖核酸 (Deoxyribonucleic acid). A specific segment of the DNA is labeled as a gene (基因 Gene).



Evaluation of Front-line Health Worker Training

- Issue: There is a need for trained and skilled frontline healthcare workers to help fill the gaps in culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- Funding Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Objective: To assess increases in core competencies [team work, communication, problem solving, knowledge, technical skills] of frontline health workers as a result of participating in training program
- Data Collection Approach: Administered pre-post survey with participants complemented with pre and post focus group discussions
- Findings: Overall, trainees gained useful skills relevant to their positions at CBWCHC as a result of participating in the training program. Data from the post program surveys suggest that trainees had moderate improvements in all five core competency areas. They experienced the highest improvement in regards to technical skills. Trainees also stated that they would recommend the training program to their coworkers.



Review Questions

1. How do we define research?
2. What are some major barriers in conducting research?
3. How do we convince the skeptics about the important value of research?
4. Is your organization ready and committed to undertake research activity?
5. How can research be used to benefit a nonprofit organization?
6. What are some key steps in planning a research project?
7. What are some tradeoffs in using internal versus external resources to undertake research activity?
8. As a result of this session, what kind of a role do you foresee that research can play in your organization?



Thank you!

Contact information:
ssim@cbwchc.org

