

**EMBEDDING EQUITY IN
NEWCOMER RESEARCH:**

**CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS,
CULTURAL BROKERING,
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The works discussed today hail from the lands of:

- Mohkinstsis - Where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. Treaty 7 land that includes the City of Calgary.
- Mi'kma'ki - The land of the Mi'kmaq people, the unceded land which encompasses the City of Halifax.

OVERVIEW

1. Introduction to topic and objectives

2. Three Case Studies

3. Facilitated Q & A

The Panelists

Dr. Margherita
Cameranesi

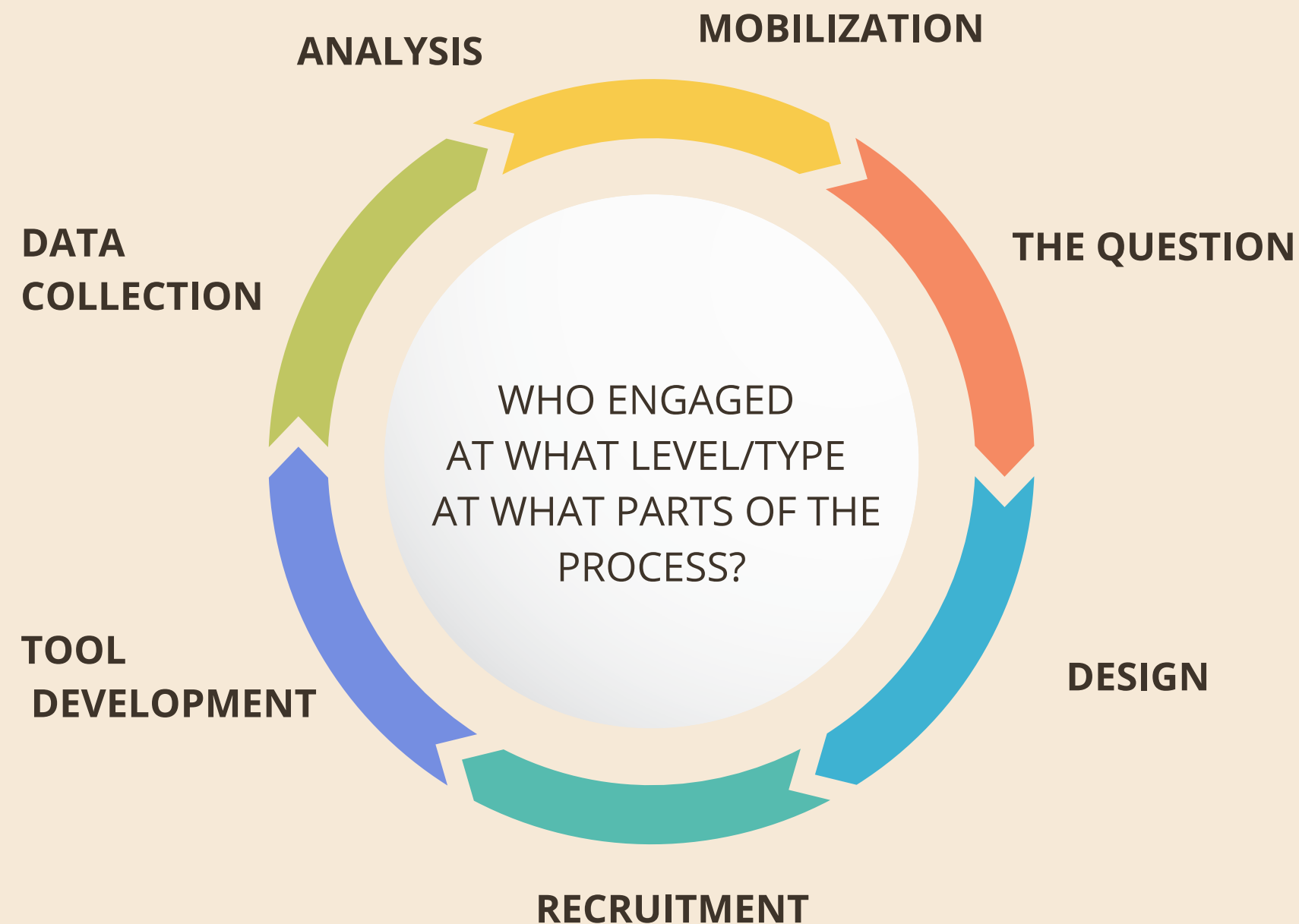


Saint Mary's
University

Amanda Weightman
Laurent Wall
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HOW CAN WE EMBED CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN RESEARCH?



“Being a culturally responsive researcher involves the following values (Farmer et al. ,2005):

- **“explicit recognition, valuing, and discussion” of cultural differences**
- **validating the worldviews of participants;**
- **explicitly discussing power differentials;** and
- acknowledging that **nontraditional research methods may work better with participants of differing cultural values.**

In addition, cultural responsiveness includes an **affirming attitude toward cultural differences** (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 2007).” (Maria Lahmann)

CASE STUDY: CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICES IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RESEARCH

Laurent Wall (he/him)

Habitus Consulting Collective

What am I talking about today?

- As research and evaluation consultants, we are brought in to pre-designed research projects and carry them out.
- Focus today: making a traditional research project on community to be more culturally responsive in its implementation. The positions taken here reflect my own values and morals, and my focus is on where we have power to act and 'do better.'

Special thanks to the partners and funder:

- Thank you to the partners: UCalgary, Alberta International Medical Graduates Association, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, and Mosaic Refugee Health Clinic.
- This project was supported by a grant from The Foundation of Advancing Family Medicine (FAFM) and the CMA Foundation (CMAF) for the COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Impact Grant (Co-RIG) Program Phase II.

CASE STUDY: CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICES IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RESEARCH

Topic today

- I am reflecting on a multi-partner research project.
 - Not a community based research project.
 - A research project on community.
- Takeaway: as researchers we can nudge towards CBR principles and outcomes, as well as more equitable processes and outcomes.

The Project

- Research design and ethics approved prior to my arrival.
- Exploratory research on COVID-19 models of vaccination for refugees (and newcomers) in place during a turbulent period.
- Methods: Qualitative (structured and semi-structured) interviews in multiple languages (English, Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Pashto)

Who was involved?

The team:

- Operations team
 - UCalgary - PI
 - **Habitus** - Data collection and analysis
 - Partners: AIMGA, Mosaic, CCIS
- **Interviewer/interpreters** recruited through Habitus and AIMGA.
 - Arabic
 - Dari (and Farsi)
 - Pashto

PUSH FROM 'RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY' TO 'RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY.'

What is cultural responsiveness:

- A process and an outcome.
- Acknowledges (and takes action) the importance of cultural diversity, different ways of knowing and sense-making, and of language in being able to participate in any given opportunity.
- Can enrich the research process and research outcomes - for all.
- Requires reflection, foresight and tailored approaches.



PUSH FROM 'RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY' TO 'RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY.'

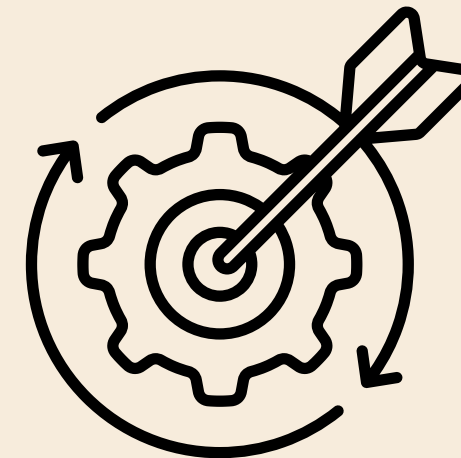
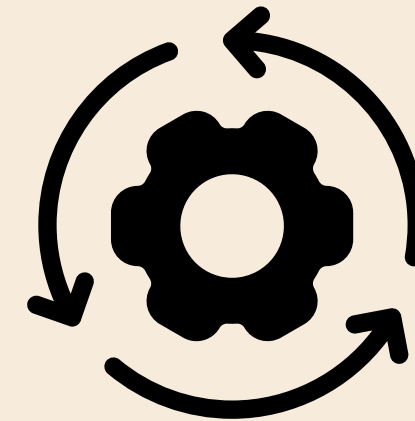
What can be more responsive:

- **Processes:**

- Research questions, design and implementation.
- Which voices that are included.
- How you include voices and interact with:
 - Community members/participants.
 - Research partners.
 - Data collectors, interpreters.
 - Community liaisons, brokers, and peers.

- **Outcomes:**

- What you report on and share.
- How you report and share.
- Levels of trust built, reliability of data, ethical outcomes.
- What you leave; how benefits are distributed.



PUSH FROM 'RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY' TO 'RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY.'

How do you make processes and outputs more culturally responsive:

- a. There are ways to be more responsive through decisions made at the steering level
- a. There are ways to be more responsive at the operational level:
 - - e.g., embedding community perspectives through intentional data collection
 - How you recruit
 - What and how you collect: On-site interviews, in first-language, with trusted intermediaries.



We could not have achieved what we did without skilled interviewer/interpreters.

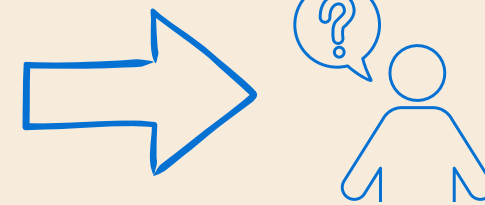
What did interviewer/interpreters do:

- First-language recruitment.
- Ongoingly built trust with participants.
- Provided feedback on refugee-specific practices (e.g., recruitment scripts, venues for interviews, interview materials, refugee experiences).
- Conducted first-language qualitative interviews with GARs (Dari, Pashto), PSRs and sponsors (Arabic), and translated/transcribed into English.
- Co-interpreted findings and shaped analytical directions (short conversations, booked sessions).

PUSH FROM 'RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY' TO 'RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY.'



We could not have achieved what we did without **skilled interviewer/interpreters.**



We took a **strengths-based approach to working with interviewer/interpreters.**

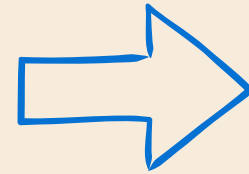
Approach: **Highlight newcomer skills as strengths, pay for their strengths, and amplify their strengths.**

- Shape job posting through partner input. Recruit through community partners. Reflect all required skills in pay (e.g., kind and professional interaction skills, settlement experience, dual language, research knowledge, data collection and analysis).
- Talk about job expectations openly. Identify what they are good at, gaps in skills/knowledge, and what they need to succeed in the job. Do this throughout/as needed.
- Tailored and paid training for any training address gaps and build skills, paid data collection and transcription, paid preparation and note taking, paid analysis/interpretation.
- Build in opportunities for their strengths and knowledge to shape how data is collected and interpreted (e.g., through multiple small conversations, booked sessions; decisions in the field).

PUSH FROM 'RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY' TO 'RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY.'



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Approach: **Ensure they are at their best (culturally responsive or ethical?)**

- Develop a relationship with interviewer/interpreters. Learn about their strengths. Check in. Pick up the phone. Meet folks in the field.
- Prepare anything yourself that helps interviewer/interpreters do their work (e.g., schedule sessions, prepare recruitment pitches, translate consent forms with professional translators).
- Prepare data collectors for the situations they may face. Identify any snags and act accordingly. Ask for their input on snags.
- Identify 'extra work' and either pay for the time, or do it yourself. Identify any barriers to doing the work (e.g., transportation challenges) and address them.
- Recognize their 'multiple hats' and different priorities (duty of care to refugees, parents, children, economic providers), learn about them, and adapt.

For the
research team

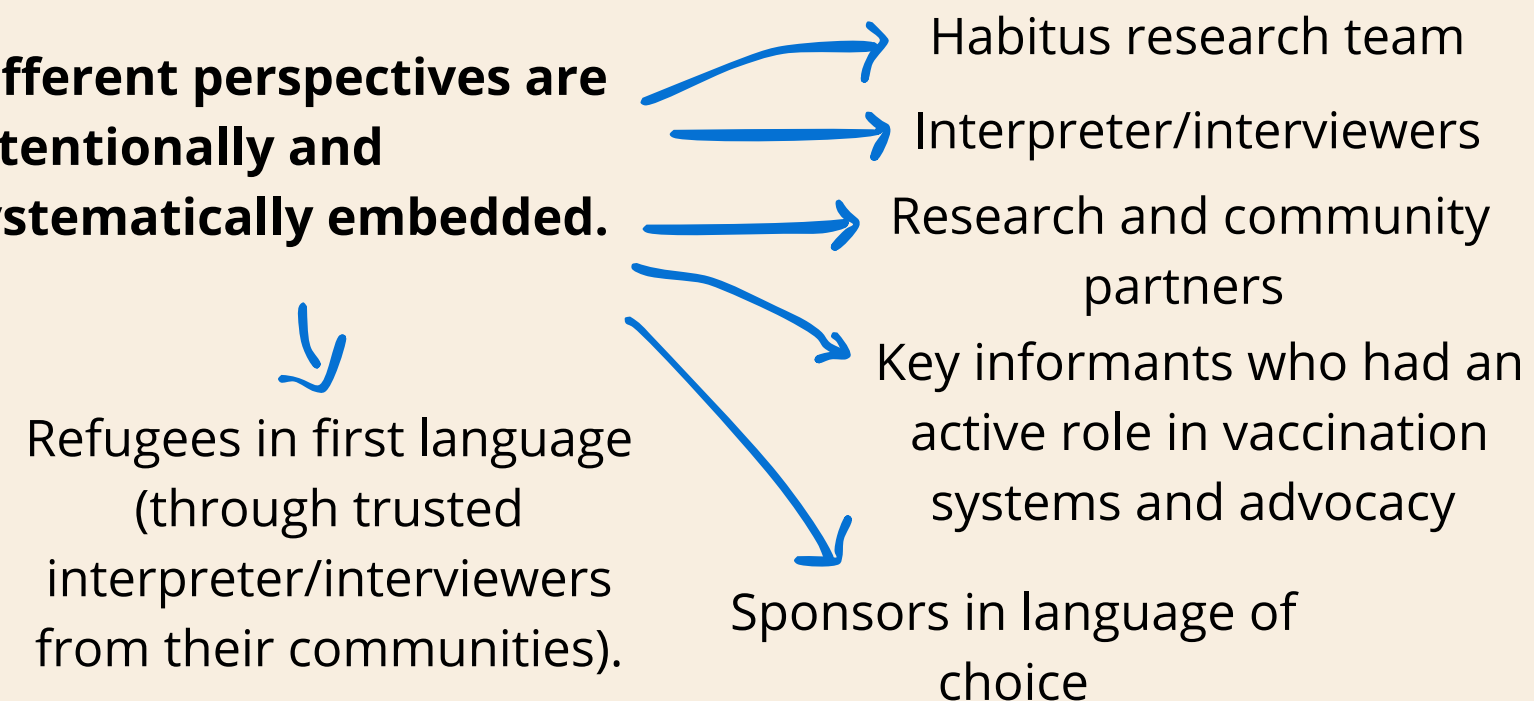
Outcomes as a whole

Outside the
research team

✓ Research completed on time, with published results.

A community-centered voice contributes to community-health intervention knowledge. IMGs critical to success.

✓ Different perspectives are intentionally and systematically embedded.



✓ Qualitative findings are validated and refined through intentional feedback loops.

In our case with: research and community partners, latter interviews, and interviewer/interpreters.

✓ Where we did have CBR aligned impacts

We were able to impact: IMGs, partners, refugees

✓ Paid and relevant work experience for IMGs
Positive work experiences for IMGs.
Paid skill building opportunities for IMGs.
Opportunities to shape research.

✓ One partner used findings to receive more funding for IMG-specific programming.

✗ **Challenge:** Harder to make lasting impacts through traditional research approaches.

~ Limited reach of academic publications.

~ Less impact: system changes, policy changes, system resources.

✓ Friendly, first-language interactions with trained medical professionals for refugees, during a period of major upheaval.

Less burden for participating as a refugee. Remuneration and benefits to participation included.

Valid information received through trusted intermediaries.

TAKEAWAYS

Take home one: It works.

- Even in traditional research contexts, **we have the power to change how we conduct research.** We can affect both the process and the outcomes.
- **It makes a difference if we shift** to be more responsive to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, and if we take a strengths-based approach to working with first-language team members.
- There are **skilled people out there** for rigorous, cross-cultural work. We can create mutually beneficial opportunities and succeed together. Finding them means working with community partners. To maximize the rewards, it means investing in training and building on what is there.
- Research is more adapted in process and outcomes, which means:
 - **Less snags.**
 - **Better data; Outputs are shaped by community voices.**
 - **Better partnerships.**
 - **Increased data collector and community buy-in.**

TAKEAWAYS

Take home two: It's not easy.

- Culturally responsive research **requires resource and time investments**. While you are not starting from scratch, you have to adapt to each setting.
- For research: It takes **a direct supervisor/coordinator with time and specific values, skills and approaches**, and **decision makers who believe in the value of such time and resource commitments**.
- **Resistance vs fostering imagination**: Groups can be amenable to adapting. You won't know until you try. Some researchers believe in the benefits of CBR-practices, some don't - even if you make a good case.
- **Everyone has different pushes and pulls** - figuring this out and adapting is key.
 - Push to publish or perish / Push to survive as a newcomer / Push for funding
- There are issues you can't solve:
 - **For the team**: The public health emergency and services sector was in constant flux.
 - **For research**: Limited resources of research; how much you can adapt.
 - **For IMGs**: Accreditation pathways; demands on IMGs (this is a temporary P/T job, not a dream job.)

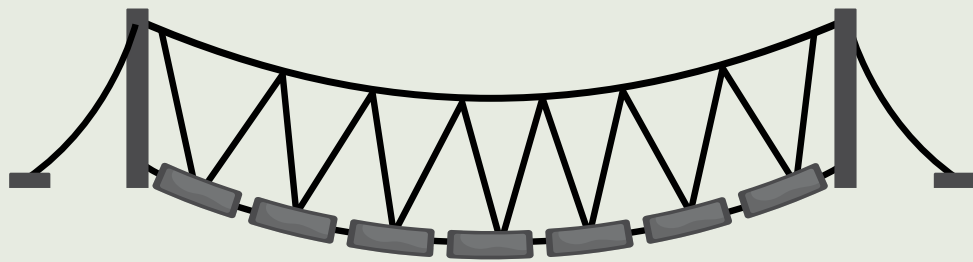
CASE STUDY: BRIDGING WORLDS: PEER APPROACHES TO EQUITABLE NEWCOMER RESEARCH AND EVALUATION



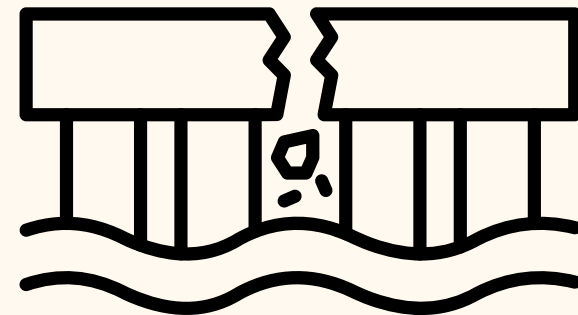
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Building Bridges in Research



- Precarious
- Easily abandoned
- Detached from the communities they intend to serve



It's not enough to build a bridge. We must design it structurally — safe and robust, with clear supports, and a sense of who will cross it, with whom, and why.

With gratitude and in the spirit of co-creation

Peers and
Brokers

- Vehicle for Hire
- CPS Anti-racism Roadmap
- Brokers Building Bridges

Partners

- City of Calgary
- Calgary Police Service
- ActionDignity
- Newcomer Research Network

Elders and
Knowledge Keepers

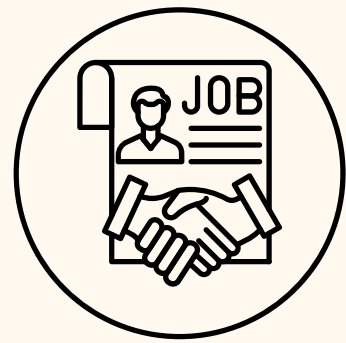
- Representing Treaty Seven and Métis Nation of Alberta

Defining Equitable Peer Research

Advisory



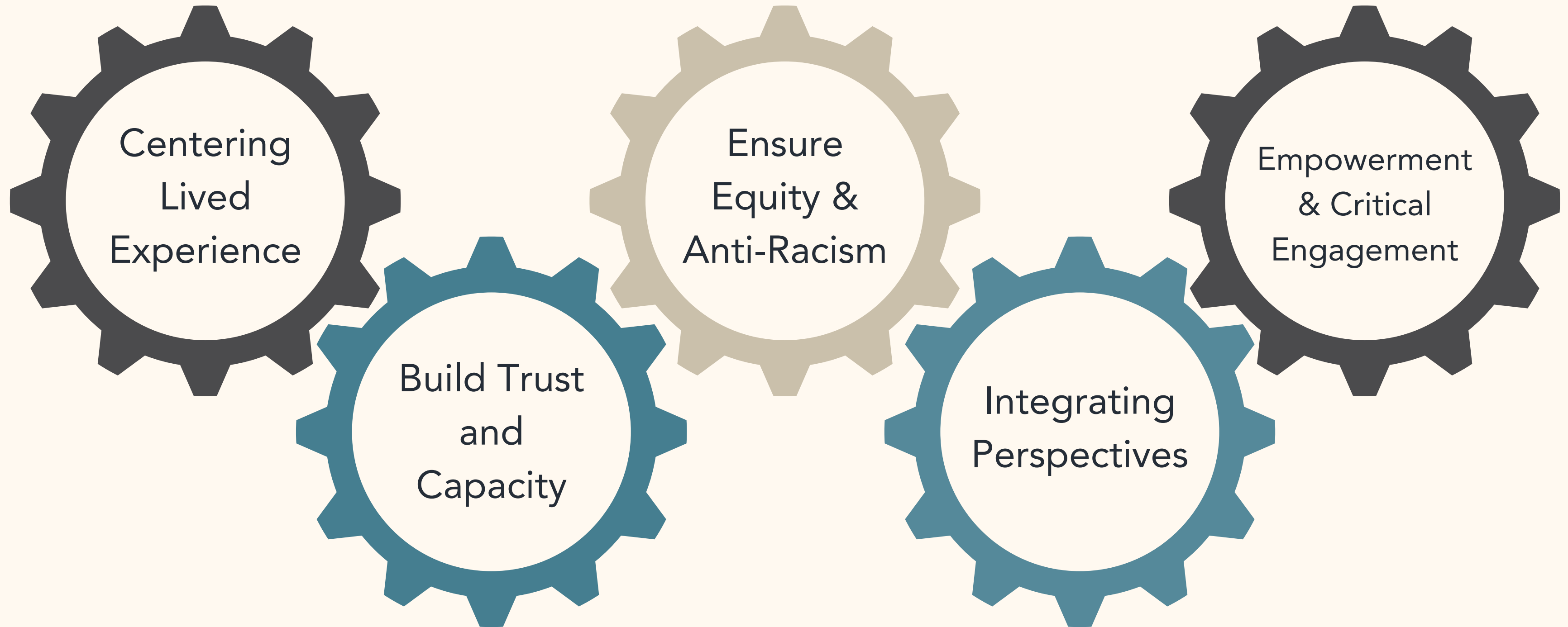
Employment



Partner



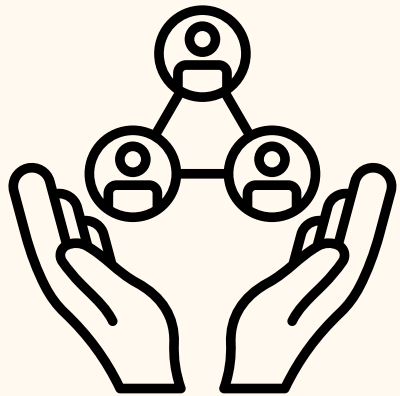
Habitus Approach: Engineering Equity



Case Study: Vehicle for Hire



Drivers



Peer Researchers

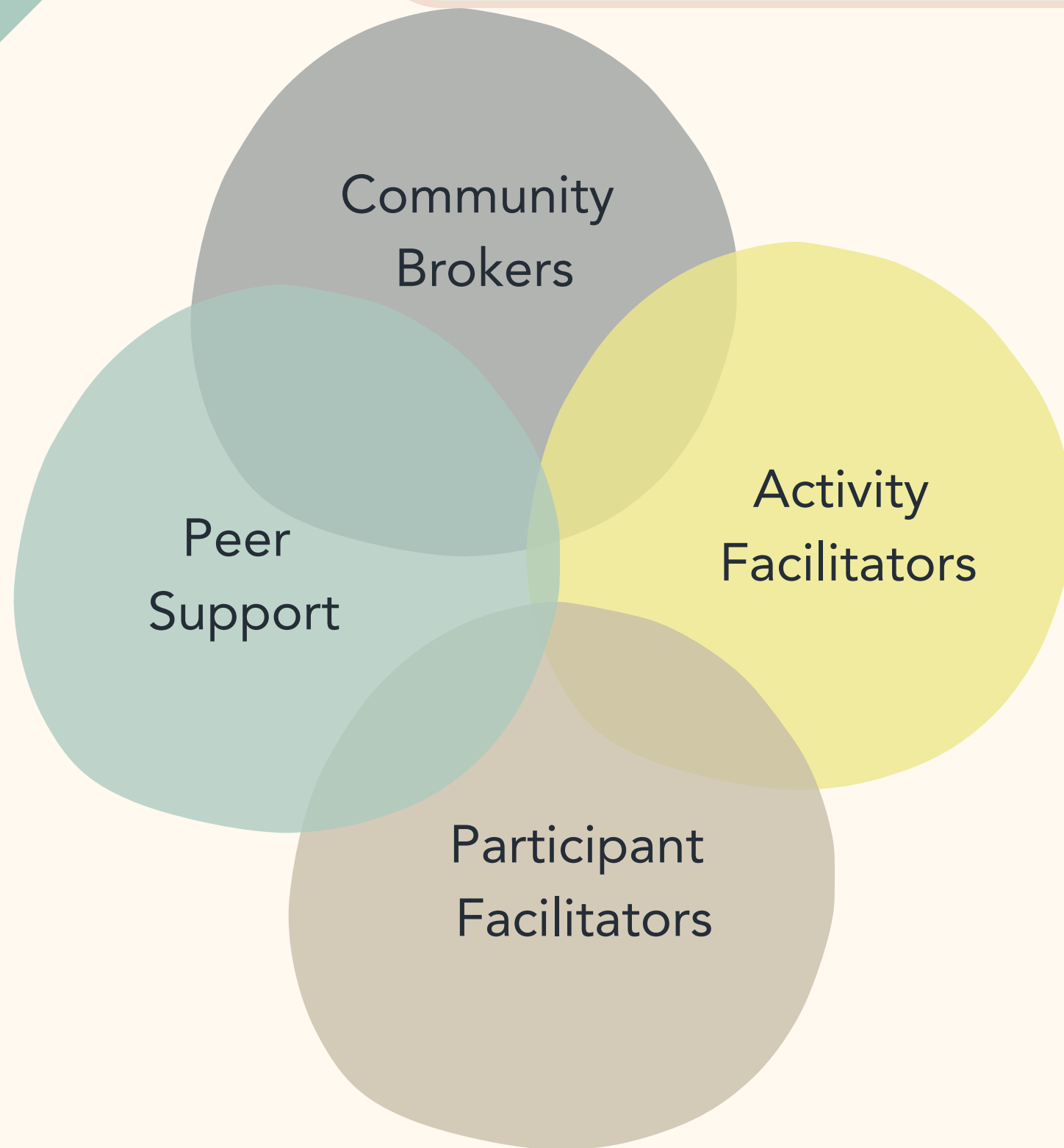


City Team

Outcomes

- Reached previously invisible drivers
- Collected survey data from 50 drivers and focus groups with 4
- Created sustainable bridges between City staff and the driver community
- Shifted City learnings about trust-building, communication, and co-governance

Case Study: CPS Anti-Racism



Outcomes

- Reached individuals with direct justice-system experience
- Generated priority actions centering Indigenous and racialized lived experience
- Ensured participation was meaningful, safe, and empowering

Case Study: Broker Bridge Building Pilot



Brokers

Outreach

**Data &
Mapping**

**Co-
analysis**

**Community
Impact**

Emerging Outcomes

- Structured co-analysis transforms peers from data collectors into critical theorists of their own communities.
- Capacity-building is not training people to join the system; it's equipping them to challenge it.

Bringing it all together

REMEMBER:

- Redistributing power
- Redistributing resources
- Redistributing legitimacy
- Designing structures that protect dissent
- Building lasting bridges

ACTIONS:

- Paid peer researchers
- Redirect budget
- Shared-analysis sessions
- Dedicate time for relationships
- Not just "How do I involve peers?" but "What structural power will they hold?"



Laying the Groundwork

Cultural Brokering as the Foundation for Community-Engaged Mental Health Research with Newcomer Populations

Margherita Cameranesi & Seeba Wahabi

Saint Mary's University

Pathways to Prosperity National Conference

Halifax (NS), Canada



Opening Reflection

To build trust, we first need to speak
the same language — not just in
words, but in values”



Cultural Brokering

- Cultural brokering is the act of building understanding, trust, and connection between people from different cultural or social worlds — often between communities and systems like research, health, or education
- In research, cultural brokers:
 - Help bridge language and meaning
 - Support mutual learning between researchers and participants
 - Ensure that research practices are culturally safe and respectful
 - Foster trust, accessibility, and inclusion throughout the process



Why This Matters

- Mental health stigma and cultural taboos often silence newcomer voices
- Standard research tools don't always fit cross-cultural contexts
- Cultural brokering bridges understanding, trust, and access



Our Research Project

- Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach
- Community Advisory Committee involving persons with lived experience and a service provider
- Goal: To explore the mental health needs and priorities of racialized refugee youth and the mechanisms promoting their resilience
- Funder: SSHRC



Our Research Approach

- Participatory, strength-based, and trauma-informed
- Qualitative methods: Focus groups, walking interviews, and photovoice projects with 38 racialized refugee youth living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
- Youth as co-researchers



Why Cultural Brokering Was Essential

- Language barriers and different cultural frames of “mental health” and “resilience”
- Youth reluctance to discuss emotional struggles publicly
- Need for trusted intermediaries



What Cultural Brokering Looked Like

- Brokers were service providers, interpreters, and youth mentors
- They helped with language, cultural framing, emotional safety, and trust-building
- Example: A broker reframed “mental illness” as “well-being” to reduce stigma and promote dialogue
- Three components:
 1. Trust building
 2. “Cross-cultural “translation”
 3. Relational ethics



Building Trust

- Slow, relational process - not transactional
- Showing up consistently mattered more than formal credentials
- “You can’t talk about trauma in the first meeting”



Negotiating Meaning Across Cultures

- “Mental health” translated differently across languages and experiences
- Brokers helped interpret stories through cultural, not just linguistic lenses
- Cultural brokers helped translate not just language, but lived experience
- Example: One youth explained that in their language, there is no word for “mental health” - only phrases like “the heart is heavy



Relational Ethics in Action

- Relational ethics is about being accountable, respectful, and responsive within the relationships that make research possible
 - Ethical practice is not a checklist, but an ongoing, relational process built on trust, empathy, and care
- Reciprocity and accountability to community partners
- Trauma-informed lens
- Consent as ongoing dialogue



Challenges

- Brokers sometimes caught between community loyalty and research expectations
- Risk of emotional fatigue or role strain
- Power dynamics between researchers and brokers
- Cultural brokering takes time... a lot of time!



Lessons Learned

- Brokering is not a role - it's a relationship
- Researchers must share power, not just tasks
- Trust and understanding take time, humility, and cultural reflexivity



Implications for Practice

- Cultural brokering can improve engagement, retention, and emotional safety
- It helps design research and interventions that are community-informed and culturally responsive
- It encourages equitable and inclusive research partnerships



Key Takeaway

- Cultural brokering is not a supplementary step; it is the foundation of equitable research with culturally diverse populations



THANK YOU!

- We sincerely thank all the youth who shared their stories with us and all the CAC members as well as any other service provider or person with lived experience who contributed to this work.
- Margherita Cameranesi, Margherita.Cameranesi@smu.ca
- Seeba Wahabi, Seeba.Wahabi@smu.ca

THANK YOU! MERCI!

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