



The Black Experience Project in the GTA

Data Collection Evaluation and Best Practice Report

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Executive Summary

This summative evaluation constitutes a reflection on the Black Experience project data collection process, and its coordination and application. It focuses on the role of the community researchers¹ who were central to the success of the process. It also identifies some limitations and challenges to the data collection model. Finally, it identifies some best practices arising from the community based research methodology and the benefits of the approach.

Using the logic model, the evaluation sought to reconcile the commitments and expectations that the project articulated with the data collection process outcomes. The evaluation process also relied on three key tools to evaluate the rationale and effectiveness of the data collection approach, methodology, the key elements and the outcomes. It utilized:

- A self-reported feedback tool used by key members of the coordination team
- It deployed a survey of the community researchers.
- It used a facilitated debrief session that provided valuable information about the experience of the community researchers with the data collection process.

The data from these tools were collated and analyzed for insights into the process. An important part of the evaluation was the recognition of the importance of the values that informed the research, the principles that articulated those values and the extent to which the process of data collection reflected those values and principles.

The evaluation covers the activities of the project related to data collection, and includes key aspects of the co-ordination of the data collection, recruitment of the interviewers and participants, and in particular, the role, relevance and effectiveness of the community interviewers in recruitment and the survey administration part of the data collection. The active participation of community researchers represents a commitment to the community based research approach as one of the key principles guiding the Black Experience Project. They served to achieve the action research goals and objectives of the project articulated below.

Overall, the evaluation notes a positive and rigorous data collection experience whose total sum appears far greater than its parts. It concludes that the data collection process was carried out in a manner consistent with the articulated goals, objectives and principles. The project recruited, trained and utilized over fifty (50) community researchers who subsequently recruited participants and conducted 1,500 interviews. The data collection process particularly demonstrates the value of community- institutional partnerships in investigating communities 'on the margins' of society. The partnership idea behind the project represents an exciting approach that brought together a research institute (Envionics Research Institute), academic institution (Ryerson University Diversity Institute), mainstream service and funding organizations

¹ Community researchers refers to those who served principally as interviewers but their role in community based research project is often acknowledged as multi-faceted. They act both as representatives of the research project in the community, explaining the relevance and importance of the research as well as recorders who administer surveys. They also collect supplementary information about the population which is relayed to the project. They help contribute to a multi-dimensional understanding of the population under study. In this case, a significant number of the community researchers also took up other roles, in recruitment, promotion and engagement.

(United Way of Toronto and YMCA of Greater Toronto) and some Black community organizations, as collaborating partners in a meaningful process of investigation that is producing ground breaking knowledge about the Black community in the GTA.

A key best practice from the project is its utilization of a comprehensive survey and a stratified sample to account for the diversity of the population and the complexity of the experience under study. Given the size of the sample, the co-ordination of the data collection project was complex and intensive but well structured. The evaluation identified some benefits to the community and important contributions to the research process attributable to the community based research approach and practice undertaken by the BEP project. These include practices that should inform research of this nature into historically marginalized populations. For instance, the extensive community engagement helped popularize the BEP project, generate opportunities for reflection among members of the community, and contribute to the expansion of 'research minded-ness' in the Black community. The data collection process represented a positive experience for many of the community researchers and participants and raised levels of civic participation and engagement, especially among the young members of the community involved in the project and enhanced community members' research skills.

The evaluation identified some limitations and challenges that the project had to overcome and offers some suggestions as to how to move forward in that regard. Chief among these was the challenge of surveying a highly diverse population, and maintaining proportions of its diversity, by gender, ethno-cultural group, age, sexuality, income and education, among others. Recruiting a stratified sample from a 'community on the margins' was both expensive and time consuming. Administering the survey required a longer period of time than anticipated at the start. A related challenge was the length of the survey necessitated by the comprehensive nature of the tool. It provided depth of exploration but often took too long to complete.

The ultimate measure of the success of the project remains the production of a report of findings that provides insights into the experience of Black community members in the greater Toronto Area. But a significant part of what will define the Black Experience Project is the process of data collection, how it was carried out, what it meant in terms of the interaction with the community and the credibility of the process, as well as the reliability of the data collected. In this case, there is a significant amount to learn about the process, its impact as well as the outcomes.

I. Introduction: About the Black Experience Project – Objectives, Research Process, Principles and Rationale

The Black Experience Project is a ground breaking study of the ‘lived experience’ of members of the Black community or those who self-identify as being of African heritage in the Greater Toronto Area. More specifically, the study coverage included the City of Toronto, and the Regions of Peel, Halton, York and Durham. The study has focused on ‘the contributions, successes, experiences and challenges’ of the members of this diverse set of communities. It is expected that the process and findings from the study will ‘contribute to the health and vibrancy of the Black community, and in so doing, the health and vibrancy of the entire GTA community’.

The BEP is led by Environics Institute for Survey research whose mandate is, among other things, ‘to sponsor relevant and original public opinion, attitude and social values research related to issues of public policy and social change’. It has been particularly interested in research focused on communities that are not usually heard from, asking questions that are not usually asked.

Consistent with that mandate, the Institute and a number of institutional partners undertook to study the experience of members of the Black community in Southern Ontario, where the majority of Canada’s Black community resides.

A total of one thousand and five hundred members of the Black community in the Greater Toronto Area – City of Toronto, and the regions of Peel, Halton, Durham and York - were recruited and interviewed by over fifty community researchers over a period of eleven months. The semi-structured interviews provided the diverse members of this community a unique opportunity to share their stories about, among others, the question of identity, media and other Canadians’ perceptions of the Black community, relationships to key institutions, prospects for education, community leadership, assets in the community, their aspirations and the aspirations of their children and youth.

This report is prepared in part to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of the data collection process for this groundbreaking research project. It provides some insights into the process as well as some best practices arising from the project. It particularly reflects on the experience of the community researchers and the data collection co-ordination team with the process. This is important because the project partners were committed to involving the Black community meaningfully in the project. That commitment informed their choice of methodology.

The report also represents an inside/outside view of the process. The author of the report is a member of the Research Advisory Group and participated in the group’s input in the design of the survey. He was also responsible for training of the community researchers who carried out the interviews. He brings a background of community based research on race and the economy, poverty, precarious employment, racialization, social exclusion and public policy.

The Black Experience Project – Key objectives and methodology

The partners identified the following as the basis for the project:

Purpose: Better understand the opportunities & challenges through the lived experience of individuals within the community, and factors leading to overcoming these challenges

Process: Collect data using respectful dialogue with Black community members to ensure that all voices are heard and understood. Explore experiences, identities, values and aspirations of members of the Black community.

Outcome: Provide valuable insight and direction in identifying policies/other initiatives that will address barriers and highlight contributions

Phases of the project. It is a three phase project with each phase contributing a discrete component of the research process.

Phase 1: Community engagement: to proactively engage the Black community to ensure the research focuses on issues of greatest relevance, and contributes to capacity building (Complete)

Phase 2: Research design and execution: to conduct an in-depth survey with a representative sample of individuals within the GTA Black community

Phase 3: Post-study dissemination and public engagement: to broadly publicize the research findings and actively engage policy-makers and the Black community around implications and next steps

The choice of methodology while not uncontroversial, was based on evidence that survey research can be a powerful vehicle for giving voice to individuals and groups who are not normally heard from. The Environics Institute has previously used this methodology to explore the experiences of members of the Muslim community in Canada as well as the Indigenous communities. The institute believes that this approach offers a ‘unique opportunity to articulate positive narratives and hopeful scenarios for the future that might not otherwise be properly heard’. The research partners saw these stories as encouraging personal initiative, stronger policies, and investments of public, private and philanthropic resources. The findings are also expected to provide the Black community leverage to harness its assets, build community strategies for success and help community leaders and policy and decision makers support Black vibrancy.

The principles guiding the research include:

- Research design is guided by input from the Black community, working with established experts.
- The collection of the data is done in a respectful way to provide individuals an opportunity to tell their own story in their own words.

- The theoretical frameworks underpinning the research study are Community Based Research, Asset-Based Methodology, Critical Race Theory.
- Study sample will be comprehensive to capture the broad diversity of the GTA Black population and participants will be engaged respectfully, so individuals have the opportunity to tell their own story
- Research draws upon local community resources (especially emerging young leaders) and gives priority to building capacity

The project focus is on the lives of individuals through an exploration of their experience, identities, values, and aspirations. It sought to conduct a respectful dialogue among this very diverse community to ensure that all voices are heard and understood. It committed to actively involve the Black community in all phases, including design, implementation, interpretation and implications

Given the history of marginalization, slavery, colonization and structural racism that this community bears in its DNA, these principles are an essential part of a meaningful exploration and learning about the experiences of the Black community in the Greater Toronto Area. A commitment to an asset-based approach is also important to mitigate the disproportionate negative portrayals of the community routinely carried in mainstream media and dominant narratives of Canadian life and history.

An anti-oppression approach to data collection was adopted to acknowledge the diversity of identities within the Black community and the reality of the various forms of oppression that apply to it and within it. These identities and related oppressions include race, gender, class, sexual difference, religion, ability, ethnicity, place of origin, age, immigrant status, among others.

The process is also informed by a critical race theoretical (CRT) approach to research, one which acknowledges the centrality of whiteness and its values, ideology and interests in Canadian society. CRT seeks to counter meta narratives expressed through theories, images, myths, about Blackness by pointing out the structural underpinnings of race and racialization in the daily live experiences of members of the Black community, experiences that include micro aggressions. CRT spotlights the form and function of marginalization, dispossession, disenfranchisement, displacement, discrimination experienced by Black people across institutions and history. It prioritizes the recovery of the voices of those dealing with such experiences. Action research from a critical race theory perspective is committed to a critical analytical program for the emancipation of Black people from the prevailing conditions of marginalization and oppression.

The project determined that to effectively engage with this historically marginalized population at the scale at which the project would be effective in documenting its complex experiences (hence the 2,000 interviews projection), it required an approach to data collection that centred the community in a significant way. A community based, participatory action research approach embodies the principles articulated above and therefore became a valuable tool for achieving the goals and objectives of the project. Because it was led by the Environics Institute, it sought to build upon the approach used successfully for the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (*Environics Institute, 2008-10*). So a key part of the assessment addresses the administration of the data

collection process with a view to identifying the extent to which it adhered to the key elements of the Community based research process.

The project established a **Research Advisory Group (RAG)** made up of a mix of members of the academic community in Toronto, drawn largely from the three universities - University of Toronto, Ryerson University and York University, and senior managers from major community institutions such as the United Way of Toronto and the YMCA. The majority of the academic members were from the Black community. The objective was to provide on-going input in the conduct of the research, and in particular the design of the survey instrument and the data collection process as a whole. The advisory group met infrequently to offer input and to review progress.

II. Evaluation Framework: What is being evaluated?

This summative evaluation uses the logic model to evaluate the outcomes of the data collection project measured against the articulated expectations set out by the project. We are interested in measuring and understanding what was accomplished by looking at the expectations, process, implementation and possibly impact of the data collection process. It focuses on:

1. The design and conduct of the data collection process
2. The extent to which the process of data collection adhered to the principles that the project outlined at the beginning, and in particular its decision to use a community based research approach as consistent with those principles.
3. The extent to which the data collection was effective because of the approach chosen
4. Any learnings to be drawn from this project and its use of the community based research approach
5. Any challenges experienced by the team and the community researchers

The evaluation utilized a number of tools including:

- A facilitated debrief session with the community researchers exploring their experience with the data collection process that was audio recorded and for which notes were also generated
- A survey tool that elicited the comments of community researchers ahead of the debrief session and after
- A self-administered feedback question and answer process that provided reflections from members of the co-ordination team.

The Black Experience Project determined that a community based research (CBR) approach would offer significant advantages in undertaking a research study of the experience of Blacks in Southern Ontario. Its focus on marginalized populations and the capacity to address the power

inequalities experienced by minoritized groups makes it attractive to apply to a project exploring the experience of a group ‘that is not usually heard from, and questions that are not usually asked’. Therefore, a closer look at the CBR model is warranted, so as to better assess the extent to which the project’s objectives measure up against the implementation of the data collection phase. In this case, we evaluate the research project’s commitment to the following articulated principles:

- Research design is guided by input from the Black community, working with established experts.
- The collection of the data is done in a respectful way to provide individuals an opportunity to tell their own story in their own words.
- Research draws upon local community resources (especially emerging young leaders) and gives priority to building capacity

These principles translate effectively into a community based research framework and reflect the values of the project in a way that makes CBR an ideal process to approach the research project.

A CBR process is varied in its application and tends to be resource intensive. While the project had to address some financial considerations in order to commit to this approach, it is clear that the value of the approach recommended it and the project was able to raise more resources to cover the cost of the process. Below we provide a more complete discussion of the CBR and the rationale for its use in a research project such as the BEP.

Questions related to actual application and benefits arising are addressed later in the report.

III. Community Based ‘Action’ Research (CBR)

“Community based research is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change” (Brenda Roche, 2008: 4).

A critical aspect of the Black Experience Project was the need to translate the principles outlined into practice. One way to do that was to adopt a community based research approach to the data collection process. It opened the door for more inclusive community involvement in the project and the opportunity to draw on the resources, expertise and knowledge of the community. It therefore represents an important metric for evaluation.

Community based Research (CBR) is a change-oriented, value-based model of research and knowledge development. It is a model that seeks to ensure that community members can meaningfully participate in the research process by centring them or putting them at the heart of the research. It is also an action oriented approach with the goal of addressing issues

important to the community and in particular to those with the lived experience that is under study. In other words, as a form of action research, the aim is to solve social problems associated with the object of the research by combining knowledge with action.

According to Reason & Bradbury (2001), community based research has the potential to address the unequal relations between institutional researchers and the subjects of their research. Because it is action oriented, ***“Its purpose is the generation of knowledge that is strategically catalytic to the social change process, not as a ‘nice’ by-product of research, but as a fundamental non-negotiable animating life-force”***.

Among other things, community based research seeks to validate the ‘lived’ knowledge and expertise of community along with that of its research partners. As a community sensitive method, it makes questions more relevant and the data more meaningful. It has the effect of democratizing knowledge because it takes seriously the lived experience of community researchers and participants. Its focus on community outcomes empowers the community even as it acts like an effective research tool.

Community based research has its roots in attempts to recover the voices and experiences of marginalized populations who are otherwise common subjects of mainstream institutional inquiry because of the social challenge their marginality poses for societies. The approach has common roots with such traditions as feminism, post colonialism and critical race theory – traditions that have articulated the position and conditions of historically minoritized populations.

Because of its emphasis on socially created knowledge, it privileges the participation of members of the subject population in the research. It builds on shared values, norms of behaviour and common concerns (Israel et al, 1998). Community based research is also context based, purpose driven and prioritizes community participation. It also emphasizes ethical considerations and constructivism.

Because community based research is said to ensure that community perspectives, needs and insights are well represented and integrated in research (Roche, 2008), the Black Experience Project identified it as a vehicle for ensuring Black community input in the project and respectful engagement with the community, not to mention drawing upon community resources and also building research capacity in the community.

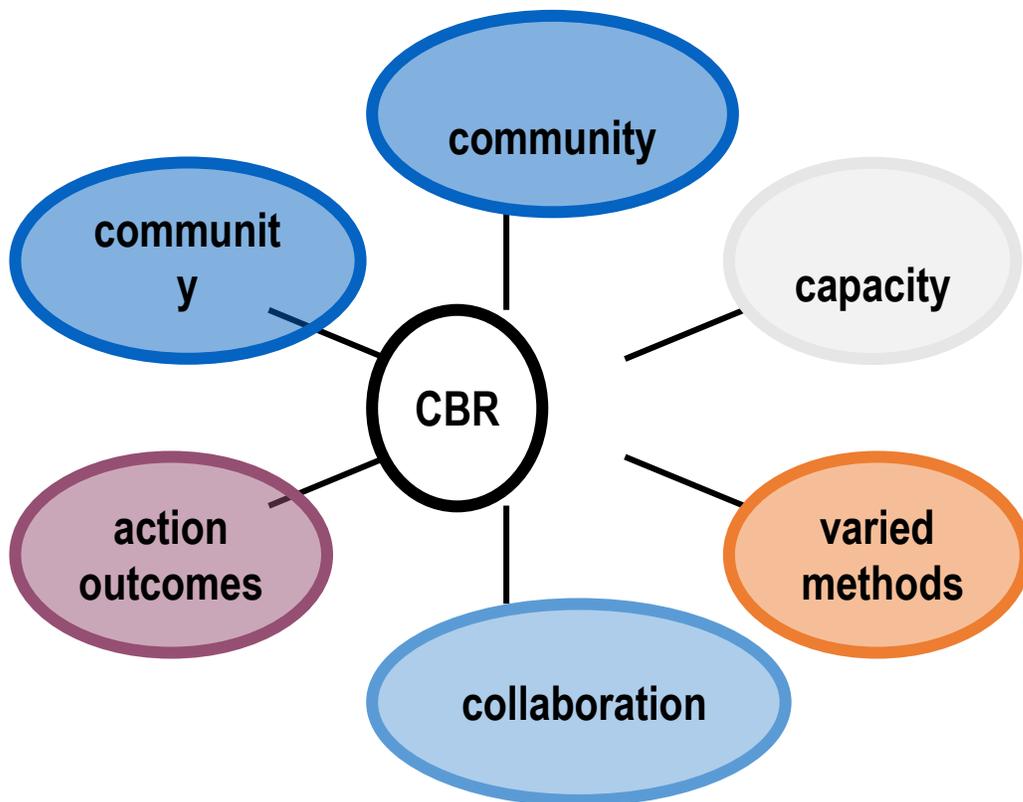
In that regard, it represented a model of research that would fulfil the principles as outlined for the project. What remains to be established is the extent to which the practice adhered to what is generally understood as CBR practice and to what extent it also met the objectives and goals of the project.

Israel, Schulz, Parker and Becker (1998) have articulated nine key principles of community based research as follows:

1. It recognizes community as a unit of identity
2. It begins with and builds on strengths and resources within the community

3. It facilitates collaborative, equitable partnerships in all phases of the research, involving an empowering and power sharing process
4. It promotes co-learning and capacity building among all partners involved
5. It integrates and creates a balance between knowledge generation and action for mutual benefit to all partners
6. It places emphasis on local relevance of social problems and ecological approaches that address the multiple determinants of well being
7. It involves systems development through a cyclical and iterative process
8. It disseminates findings to all partners and involves all partners in the dissemination process
9. It involves a long-term process and commitment

CBR provides a means by which institutional researchers can work with community and ensure that community members achieve skills development and capacity building in basic research. These skills can then be utilized by community organizations and institutions to support community development. But depending on its application, it also runs the risk of being superficial, patronizing communities and being ineffective as a social of credible knowledge and action.



IV. Data collection process

A survey coordination, recruitment and administration team was assembled that included a project manager, a project coordinator, and interview manager and regional team leads in Toronto, York region and Peel/Halton. Perhaps more importantly, the project chose an ambitious direct contact model of surveying, involving an in person interview process. This provided both the potential to engage a mixed method approach to data collection. It maintained the form of a quantitative data collection tool with a qualitative method of engagement with the participants.

That decision reflects the preoccupation with the principles laid out as guiding the research project. It is consistent with the following principles:

- Study sample will be comprehensive to capture the broad diversity of the GTA Black population and participants will be engaged respectfully, so individuals have the opportunity to tell their own story
- Research draws upon local community resources (especially emerging young leaders) and gives priority to building capacity

The challenge was to have a sample that was both large enough to be significant but also diverse enough to reflect the complexity and diversity of the Black community in Canada. The choice to survey 2000 people and use a semi-structured interview process meant that significant resources would be needed to achieve the objective of a true exploration of the experience of Blackness in Canada's largest city. A stratified sample was necessary to achieve the representation of diversity along, gender, ethnic, sexual difference, age and immigrant status necessary to effectively survey the lived experience of Black residents of the Greater Toronto Area.

The project presented survey research as a powerful vehicle for giving voice to positive narratives and hopeful scenarios for the future. It argued that properly conducted surveys provide credible empirical evidence that is more broadly accepted than anecdote, as a basis for collective action. It indicated that surveys also have the potential to provide a more nuanced understanding of diverse communities, through analysis of key groups (e.g., age, gender, religion, national origin). And they can also provide the types of positive stories that encourage individual initiative, better policies and investment of public, private and philanthropic resources.

There is a tension between traditional survey methods that tend to be anonymous and use large samples, and the interview process that often scales down in terms of numbers but draws deeper understandings of the phenomena under study. But in this case, the effort was to try and bridge that gap by using a survey instrument that is largely quantitative in format but administered using a semi-structured interview process.

The decision to use a survey instrument and conduct approximately 2000 interviews meant that the project was trying to combine the benefits of an interview process with those of a survey instrument. There is an inbuilt tension in that decision but also significant potential for rewards

in terms of the depth of the explorations of the Black experience, the platform to elicit rich narratives and to honour the commitment to hear people out as fully as possible, within the constraints the project is operating under.

The interview process represented a facilitated conversation conducted on a one-on-one basis with a mix of open ended and closed questions in a largely structured format but with some aspects of what could be described as semi-structure – given the scope for prompts in the survey.

It operated under the premise that the interview process, which tends to involve a smaller group of people, allows for a deeper engagement with the topic by providing in-depth explorations.

In terms of data type, it can generate detailed and rich narratives about individual experiences and interpretations. It also allows for interviewers to do follow-up and probe in ways other methods can't. And the researcher can specifically include diverse population and marginalized groups

There are some limitations worth noting. The size of the sample size may make it difficult to get representative sample. But if the research project chooses to conduct large numbers, that can be time consuming. Finally, it requires good or well developed interview skills.

V. Coordination of the data collection

The Co-ordination team was made up of the BEP Project manager, BEP project Coordinator, Interview manager, and regional team leads for Toronto, York region, Peel/Halton. The co-ordination team was tasked with the recruitment of the researchers to do the data collection as well as the recruitment of the participants. A total of fifty-nine (59) people engaged in the process of data collection as survey administrators. It was the responsibility of the co-ordination team to manage the otherwise quite ambitious process of ensuring that, once recruited, they are trained to the level they can competently do BEP interviews, equipped with the necessary materials for survey administration, scheduled across four regions and maintain contact both with the participants ahead of the interviews as well as the researchers before and after the interviews. The recruitment and administration of the survey were undertaken over an eleven month period.

The task of recruiting community researchers was a real and challenging one. It required advertising through social media, present at events in the community, tapping into existing social and cultural networks and reaching out to Black community organizations. It especially benefited from networks with organizations working with Black youth in the GTA. Particular benefit came from the connection between the YMCA of Greater Toronto and the Youth Employment Services, which yielded paid researchers that defrayed some of the project costs.

Scheduling. Scheduling responsibility involved contacting the recruited participants to schedule interviews, maintaining a record of the interviews scheduled and done. Schedulers assumed the responsibility of identifying the ideal space for interview: at libraries, universities, community agencies and commercial public places such as coffee shops. They also provided project tracking spreadsheets for the recruiters and regional leads, to ensure consistency.

Providing Interviewers with Participants' Telephone Numbers. As the process unfolded, the co-ordination team adjusted its approach to address some of the concerns expressed by the researchers. For instance, as the interview supervisor reports, in the last month of data collection, the schedulers began to provide researchers with the telephone numbers of participants. This strategy essentially took out “the middle man”, enabling interviewers to call respondents before they left for an interview and when at the venue. In some cases it also enabled them to reschedule interviews thereby lessening the work of the schedulers. This approach proved more efficient and seemed to lower the number of no-shows.

E-mails Updates. At some point, the coordination team began to send update e-mails to researchers as a way of improving the communication process. This created an open channel of communication that transcended the daily checks on specific interviews. Due to the fact that researchers were not required to attend weekly staff meetings as the co-ordination team and were not in the office frequently, they were often unaware of what was happening with the project. The update e-mails process was suggested by the researchers during one of the update meetings and became an effective way for them to stay engaged, connected and invested in the project.

Check-ins outside of interviews. The interview supervisor occasionally sent text messages to researchers to check in on how they were doing and if they needed support on anything connected to the project. When the team received feedback on a specific interview, it was passed along to researchers and when necessary a follow up conversation was held with them regarding the feedback. The interview supervisor reports that she would send affirming messages, letting people know that she appreciated how hard they were working and recognized the effort they were putting into the project. These check-ins and affirmations supported the development of an encouraging and supportive work environment.

Adjusting Interactions based on the individual. The interview supervisor observed that supervising over 30 individuals who ranged widely in age, background and perspective would be more effective if she did not attempt to use a uniform strategy when communicating. She said that she would consider the context of each individual and attempted to be sensitive to their varying comfort levels and preferences when communicating. She saw this as taking more time but time, nurturing healthier relationships.

Dealing with conflict. The Interview supervisor reported that there were several incidences during her tenure when conflict arose. She understood these to be mostly about miscommunication between schedulers and interviewers. In those moments, she engaged in conflict resolution, a function she saw as essential to keeping the trains on track. It was not easy for interviewers to recognize the amount of work schedulers do and how much pressure came with their role. Alternatively it was challenging for schedulers to always be sensitive to the frustrations that came with interviewers dealing with respondents who were often late or did not show up. In those incidents it was critical to engage active listening, not pass judgement but be sensitive to their frustrations and when possible to provide insight into the larger perspective.

Check-ins with schedulers. The Interview Supervisor understood how critical her role was and in particular how managing the scheduling process was vital to the entire project of data collection. Regular check-in with the schedulers was crucial. Sending them messages of support, making sincere inquiries into how they were doing and trying to provide varying levels of support helped create healthy channels of communication which were a frequent necessity.

VI. Sampling and Participant recruitment

The project sought to address the diversity of the population under study. A stratified sampling method was used to account for as much diversity as possible. While this conformed with the principles that guided the project, it nevertheless imposed a burden on the process of recruitment and on the members of the team that were assigned the task of recruiting 2000 respondents across five regional jurisdictions in Southern Ontario. The proportions of particular groups were difficult to achieve. Included here were participants from the suburbs, as well as those with less than high school education, and males who identify as Africans.

The project used a variety of methods for participant recruitment, including purposive and snowball methods. These have proven effective when dealing with hard to reach populations such as marginalized groups. These methods are also common in community based research because they assume a unitary community as opposed to a collection of autonomous agents whose opinions are uniquely distinct from others. Recruitment processes that utilize community networks, resources and relationships tend to have both legitimacy and effectiveness when it comes to reaching hard to reach samples.

The team employed a variety of ways to identify participants over an eleven-month period:

- A mass media campaign that involved using social media, mainstream TV and Radio appeals, newspaper ads and
- People signed up for participation through advertised process online
- The project also worked with and through community organizations and agencies as well as project partners with neighbourhood networks to tap their contacts in the defined communities and neighbourhood.
- The project deployed recruiters through community events and canvassing neighbourhoods. This was effective in identifying activists and contacts involved in activities in the neighbourhood. Once they identified potential respondents, they also asked to identify other potential respondents
- Canvassing neighbourhoods can include going door-to-door in buildings that you know or have an established contact. For your own safety, it is required that you work in pairs.

The project did not maintain sufficient information on recruitment to allow for a review of the various methods to determine which were the most effective ones. This might have provided some critical learning about effective ways of recruitment among marginalized and disadvantaged populations for research projects of this nature.

Given the stratified nature of the sample, and the need to reflect the diversity of the Black community by age, class, gender, sexuality, ethnic, place of origin, immigration status, ability, religion, and the marginalized nature of the population being sought, the process of recruitment can be considered extremely successful. While the original projection was for 2,000 interviews, the project was able to recruit and administer 1,500 interviews through a range of innovative purposive sampling methods.

An important observation is that those involved in recruitment, many also doubling as community researchers, were engaged in many of the activities in the Black community over the nine-month period. At this activities, they introduced the BEP project to the community and used the platforms to discuss the value of the research opportunity and the potential of research to offer a better understanding of the community and a platform for new and different narratives of the community. It gave them the opportunity to discuss the need for the community to escape from the dangers of a single narrative, one that tends to be negative, and to express the complexity of the Black community, and its potential.

Activities like First Fridays, Caribana, Afro-Fest, Carifest, Irie Festival and many more provided the opportunities to engage with the community and do recruitment. These opportunities were supplemented by the use of mass media and social media as well as access to universities, youth clubs, community centres and organizations. It represented a second level process of engagement with the community that deepened the connection with the BEP.

VII. Recruitment and training for community researchers

The project undertook a massive recruitment drive in the community to identify available members of the Black community who had both interest and some expertise in research. An advertising campaign helped identify a pool of potential community researchers from which over fifty (50) were selected by the team. A significant number of the people identified were youth who were either in higher education or had graduated recently. There was also an attempt to recruit more senior members of the community, including some trailblazers. The idea was to attempt to reflect the generational diversity of the community.

Other considerations included gender balance, sexuality, countries of origin or heritage (making distinctions between continental Africans, Caribbeans of African descent, and historical Black Canadians, among others).

The community researcher cohort came in with a range of capacities and researcher history and experience. Training was provided to the over fifty (50) researchers over a three-week period. A day and half training session was instituted to try and level out the knowledge base and to better acquaint the researchers to the Black Experience Project. It introduced the Black Experience Project to the researchers, provided a research overview and covered the role of the researchers, anti-oppression and critical race theory, the interview process, the use of the survey instrument, and provided an opportunity for mock interviews.

Multiple sessions were held for researchers in the various municipalities in which the survey was to be administered.

The feedback from the majority of the researchers was that the training was helpful in preparing the researchers for their role and alerted them to some of the challenges they would face. It gave them the confidence necessary to undertake the survey administration and the training manual were available to go back to when they need clarification. Researchers especially appreciated the opportunity to do mock interviews with colleagues. Some areas of improvement were identified. Some researchers indicated that the time set aside for the walk through of the survey was not sufficient and they would have preferred more time spent on that aspect of the training.

Some researchers indicated that the training should also have involved more people who work full time with surveys given that Environics Institute specializes in survey methodology. These could have acted as mentors after the training. One researcher said that she would have benefited from knowing that it would help to call the respondent

VIII. The role of community researchers in the BEP

“Community based research involves community members in all stages of the research process from the definition of the research question to ensure relevance to the community to the capacity building and integration of the community members in the conducting of the research as well as promoting the active participation in the development and implementation of the dissemination strategy. In addition, to these principles, CBR espouses the same values of methodological rigour and ethical review as other research approaches” (Canadian Institute for Health Research)

Community based research values the knowledge that comes with lived experience, and from the community. So the connections, networks and insights that come with lived experience become very valuable for conducting research among traditionally marginalized populations. Not only does it promote greater inclusiveness in the research, but it can highlight community perspectives by using community resources for data collection. Community researcher strategies have also proven effective because they tend to foster community friendly understandings of research, creating opportunities for the use of community specific instruments and techniques, while ensuring that the ways of seeing local experiences connect the research to the community and validate it as action research (Roche, Flicker & Guta, 2008).

As noted above, part of the process of operationalizing the community based approach in the Black Experience Project involved investing in a community researcher driven data collection process that animates members of the community, involves them deeply in the research and rewards them with skills and expertise to continue to serve their community. It also equips them with a strong understanding of the project purpose and objectives so that they can effectively relay these to the subject population and optimize participation.

This approach was particularly suited to the task of reaching an originally estimated 2,000 Black community members in the Greater Toronto Area. Once trained, community researchers took on key tasks relating to data collection:

- Community researchers from the Black community were responsible for planning and carrying out data-collection for the study. Some assumed the responsibility of recruitment through a variety of methods and contacts with the community.
- Through research training, they were provided with details about the aims and objectives of the study, the methodology and the survey to use for the study. It was important to understand the research process and the survey instrument prior to their participation.
- They were provided on-going guidance on how to use the survey effectively and to discuss and share your thoughts and ideas as a group. All the expectations of their role and the kind of data to be collected were outlined.

For the purposes of the evaluation, a key question is: *did the approach reflect the core idea of CBR to ensure equitable partnerships, valuing lived experience and the critical need for community involvement 'from the bottom up?'* (O'Toole, 2003)

And here we draw from some of the comments of the community researchers from the debrief session and the survey tool to provide us with some basis for assessing the effectiveness of the application of the model in the BEP process of data collection. The operating assumption is that the role of the community researchers became central to the process of data collection, as well as the definition of the project as a community research based project.

IX. Evaluation of the BEP data collection process

The evaluation of the data collection process utilized the three key tools identified above. These included: A debrief of the community researchers, a survey administered to the community researchers and a self-administered questionnaire of the coordination team.

The evaluation considered the general impression of the community researcher of the Black Experience Project, the coordination of the data collection, the relationships with the coordination team, the effectiveness of the training, the level of resources and how they impacted data collection, the interview process and the instrument, the benefits to the community researchers and to the community, lessons learnt by the researchers and their hopes and expectations of the future of the project and its legacy.

A total of twenty-five community researchers participated in the three hour debrief session. They were compensated for their participation. The debrief exercise explored the following questions:

1. What was the general impression of the community researchers regarding the Black Experience Project? They were asked to rate both the positive and negative experiences with the Black experience Project
2. What was the effectiveness of the coordination of the project?

3. What was the nature of the relationships between the researchers and the BEP team and Environics Institute staff, and how did it impact, positively or negatively, the data collection process?
4. What was the effectiveness of the training received and how it prepared the researchers for the data collection?
5. What were the benefits of participating in the project – personal and community
6. How was the interview process itself – the conduct of the interviews; the organization and coordination; how the researchers dealt with the highs and lows – good and bad interviews, no shows and
7. How effective was the survey instrument and to what extent was the administration of the survey aided or hampered by the instrument? what worked and what did not work?
8. Was the level of resources available for the activities adequate – transportation, coffee and such,
9. Meta analysis – did the research achieve its objectives?
 - did it for instance, generate reliable and relevant data;
 - any new impressions of the Black community that you did not have previous to the process;
 - what is the potential impact of the project on the community
10. Any other comments germane to the process

There was a range of responses to the questions. Among others, they ran the gamut from positive general impressions to a discussion of Blackness, the value of racial affinity in establishing trust, the nature of the actual interview process – including the dynamics of how much people had to say within time constraints, the effectiveness of the survey instrument and what benefits accrued to the researchers and the community.

General impressions

Positives. From both the debrief and the survey, the general impression of the project was mostly positive. During the debrief, most of the community researchers indicated that on a scale of one to ten, scoring the experience at 8 and above. There were at least two researchers that scored it at 6 out of 10, with explanation. A number of general comments reflected this positive assessment.

“We had an incredible time”

“What I liked most was connecting with the people in the community and hearing about events, programs and people making moves in the community...I felt a real positive energy from the people I interviewed”

"I learnt so much about my history. It was clear people wanted their voices heard and for so long they felt like they were not heard..."

"It was fun being able to talk to the community and better understand what is going on in the community"

Some researchers were delighted to have been included in the study because of its significance. They felt privileged to be part of the team and were delighted to meet so many members of the Black community, young, old, continental, Caribbean, Canadian born, immigrants, etc. They felt the study exposed the richness of the community and the warmth of the embrace of the Black community. But they said that it also exposed some of the complexities of the community. Some said they realized that some members of the Black community did not want to relate to others Black community members and so resisted being included in the count. As one researcher put it: 'They don't want to be too much like us'. They also encountered some people who were hostile to the project. A number of these were non-Black community members who expressed how uncomfortable they were with the notion of the project.

Some indicated that they even benefitted from asking people questions they otherwise would not feel comfortable asking on such topics as gender, sexuality, income. Others talked about being open to hearing new perspectives and experiences given the class and ethnic diversity in the community. Being able to hear the stories being told was also a positive for many.

Negatives. With regard to negative aspects of the BEP experience, many researchers expressed some frustration with the wait times as contact was being made to set up interviews, as well as when they got to the interview sites. As well, there were times when the respondents were not called to remind them to be at the site of the interview. The initial demand that the researchers would have to wait for at least 45 minutes for the respondents before they got paid was considered unreasonable by many researchers. The project addressed this particular concern mid stream. The survey often took longer than the time expected and promised to the respondents. Some respondents thought some of the questions were repetitive and so did not answer them. Another sore point was client no shows after long periods of travel.

It was also noted that the conditions under which interviews were undertaken were not always ideal. The space provided at some establishments, libraries, community centres and places like coffee shops were often less than ideal for privacy, for hearing each other and for creating rapport. A number of the responses to the researcher survey also indicated a concern with communication with the senior members of the team. As well, some said it appears that the financial burden of travelling across regions was not fully appreciated by the senior team members until it became a major point of conflict with the researchers. There was also a personnel decision that seemed to concern a number of the researchers, probably because it involved a person they were in constant contact with in the coordination team.

Reflection. On the question of what the participation in the research project revealed about them and how it has impacted their lives, many researchers talked about how they had to learn to be less judgemental in order to listen actively. Many conceded that they struggled with the

idea of neutrality, some arguing that it was an ethnocentric idea and that a concept of Afrocentric neutrality was necessary for Black community research.²

Some talked about getting a better understanding of the Black community, both the positive things going on as well as why the challenges persist. One researcher indicated that he had a better appreciation of why it is so hard for the community to be united, given its ethnic, cultural and geographical diversity. For some this was an emotional journey and was uplifting at times and challenging at others. Still some talked about the improvement in their interpersonal skills and awareness of the initiatives in the community.

A number of the researchers remarked that the project participation gave them a new realization of how important Blackness is to them. While they tend to take it for granted, it is a profound statement about who they are and their history and sense of being a people. But they also acknowledged that the study clarified for them the extent to which Black people have their own ways of defining Blackness and self agencies around how they live it and experience it. One researcher said that after the study, they felt more okay embracing their Jamaican identity and another that they were more comfortable with how people who want to identify as Black are defining their blackness.

Another discussion involved the question of the intersectionality of identities. There was a discussion about how people experience identities that intersect with blackness. This extended beyond gender and sexuality, to youth, immigration status and even ethnicity. The indication was that interacting with so many Black people impressed upon some of them that these complexities are worked out through the lived experience.

Some researchers were surprised at the intergenerational split in the identification of the leaders in the Black community. Younger people tended to identify a different set of leaders from older people. The question of their understanding of what constitutes strong Black leadership was also contested and a subject of intense debate.

A final discussion involved questions of how people deal with the racism that comes with the identity of Black. Researchers shared what they learnt from the interviews about how people deal with it. Some talked about confronting it while others said they manage in to avoid adverse impacts. Respondents were often forceful about how some did it right while others did it wrong and suggested that there is no middle ground. The debate is a long standing one that goes back to the risks associated with getting the approach wrong under conditions of slavery or colonization. It could often be a life and death proposition.

² An article by John-Okoria Ibhakewanlan & Simon McGrath titled "Towards an African Community Based Research Methodology" address the question of the need for Afrocentric epistemological approaches to studies involving African descendant populations. The concerns expressed by the BEP researchers may reflect this insight. John-Okoria Ibhakewanlan & Simon McGrath titled "Towards an African Community Based Research Methodology" Sage Open October-November 2015: 1-9

X. Effectiveness of data collection coordination

The researchers were generally complimentary about the project coordination. Most were satisfied with their relationship with the coordination team and commented on how the scheduling of the interviews aptly facilitated the contact and administration of the surveys. They were also appreciative of the follow up by the interview coordinator. Both in the debrief and though the survey, they indicated that the coordination was sufficient to the task, although there was room for improvement. The issue of how participants could identify the researchers was discussed and a proposal was presented involving the use of BEP identifiable T-Shirts for all researchers. Communication often broke down with the supervisors in the office and some miscommunication over scheduling was also common.

Some researchers expressed concern about what they called the minimal nature of feedback, although they felt they conducted the surveys according to the training. It might have made a difference if the researchers met more frequently to debrief and compare notes. A minimum of such opportunities were made available because of the cost of getting the researchers together. Some researchers suggested that the BEP should have invested in more training and guidance for the office staff, as well as some job security. Someone indicated that there was a sense that the BEP staff was isolated from the rest of the Environics Institute staff and that did not 'show well or feel right'.

There was some concern expressed about the way cancelled interviews or interviewees who did not show up were dealt with. Some suggested that they would have appreciated early cancellations notices given the travel involved, while others indicated that they were not clear as to how to deal with situations where the respondents did not show up. The question of reimbursement for transportation costs animated some discussion and may represent an area of learning in future projects.

Another key point of discussion had to do with the compensation process and the extent to which it covered 'all' the costs of the interview process. The issue of not paying for 'no shows' was a recurring concern. Researchers expressed some disappointment that at times they were left to cover costs related to interviews. In a number of the interview scenarios, there was an expectation of the community researchers purchasing coffee, tea or snacks for the participants, especially when they met in a coffee shop.

When asked what they would have done differently to support the researchers, some suggested that a team approach to the administration of the surveys might have benefited them. Working in teams would have made it easier to deal with some of the circumstances where scheduling breaks down. They also suggested that they could have assisted with recruitment using their networks.

Interview process

On the question of the effectiveness of the interview process, again most responses were positive. Many focussed on how trust was established in order to get the confidence of the respondents and administer the surveys. Being members of the Black community seemed to

have made a positive difference in terms of establishing trust and enabling survey administration.

“It came down to trust. The trust issue...people opened up because they trusted us as community researchers...sometimes saying things like...‘I know what you are talking about’ got people comfortable to engage in the conversation”

“I hear a lot of people saying...don’t write this down but... for me it was a sign of trust and confidence they have in me that I got their back”

Trust. The trust issue seemed to tip the balance in favour of project access to respondents who may have been leery of the project. It assured a more effective engagement with the project and successful interviews.

But there were also some concerns expressed about the role of Black community researchers themselves. One related to some feedback from people who thought that the researchers, partly because of their age, were graduate students involved in a graduate student research project. This fits into the traditional mould of research that many people are familiar with and so does not come as a surprise. However, while the issue of youth and gender were expressed as a concern in some cases, it was also noted that in a number of cases the co-ordinators were asked to schedule particular community researchers who were considered more experienced or were either male or female to take interviews with reluctant respondents.

Presentation. It was however suggested that a clear identifying uniform could have addressed this concern and indicated the institutional nature of the project. T-shirts with Black Experience Project seem to have worked effectively during the recruitment stage at community events.

Another concern had to do with people expressing reservations about sharing their information with known members of the Black community. While this was not widespread, it was noted as causing some people to either be non-expansive in their communication, not answer some questions or deciding against the interview altogether. We do not have data on the number of encounters that represented that experience though. Suffice to say that it is worth noting as a counter logic to the predominant sense that community membership and racial affinity facilitates deeper engagement with the interviewee.

Identity. There was also a discussion about the question of identity. Who is a member of the Black community and so in the eyes of some qualified to do the interviewing, or be interviewed and who might not be. What it raised were the issues relating to the central question of identity in the study itself. The project used a self-identification standard for those both recruited as community researchers as well as for the participants.

Community researchers explored this complex terrain and the implications for the sample. Many felt that it didn’t not impact the validity of the sample and that the questions were raised marginally. Others expressed concern about some of the hostility they encountered from people who either did not recognize them as Black or who contested the idea that a study would focus exclusively on Black community members.

Recorders. Community researchers indicated that they would have benefited from having audio recorders so that they could better focus on the interviewees and also to review their written record for accuracy.

Survey administration

Survey administration was the core responsibility of community researchers. It was the pathway to the information needed from the study and many acknowledged it as a complex process. Some indicated that the training they got equipped them with some techniques that made it possible to undertake it successfully.

A total of fifty-nine people engaged in survey administration at one point or other. They produced a total of 1,500 interviews over six months. The overwhelming majority of them were community researchers, with some co-ordination staff members and some advisory committee members doing a few interviews along the way. Of that total, a single researcher undertook a high number of one hundred and forty-seven (147) interviews, while two other did 139 and 138. The average number of interviews conducted was twenty-seven (27). The average time for each interview was nine-two minutes (92min), a number close to the expectation generally communicated to the participants. In one incidence though, a researcher spent 240 minutes doing an interview, while another spent 210 and another 207. These were anomalies and can be explained by extra ordinary circumstances.

The community researchers were the guts and heart of the operation. Many expressed satisfaction with their experience and preparedness. They acknowledged that survey administration requires one to establish a rapport with the participant, and that they were able to introduce the survey objectives and the process of surveying once they had established a connection. While they were able to convey to the participant the purpose of the survey and how the information will be used confidentially, a number wondered if the responses to some questions might have been better if the survey administration was anonymous. They said they were able to establish credibility using the name of the Black Experience Project and Environics Institute.

In most cases, many said the process went well and that it improved the longer they were in the field. However, the question of the length of the survey was a challenge that many had to negotiate to the very end of the process. While some people felt that the one and half hour survey was too long and would try to rush through it, the most common response was to keep at it until it was done. In many cases the survey time was longer than one and half hours, depending on the openness of the respondent with their answers and time.

Survey Instrument

The structure of the survey also offered some challenges. It was long and required an hour and half to complete in most cases. While some researchers felt it flowed from top to bottom, others thought it had some glitches and were never comfortable using the response card. The survey was very expansive by design, attempting to cover a holistic sense of the Black experience. The following were some of the sections and topics it covered.

- Introduction
- Life Satisfaction
- Black and ethnic identity
- Intersecting Identities
- Immigrant Experience
- Friends/Networks
- Community Inclusion and sense of Belonging
- Neighbourhood Safety
- Community involvement and participation
- Valuable sources of learning and growth
- Personal accomplishments and life aspirations
- Youth opportunities and challenges
- Formal Education and educational experiences
- Employment status
- Physical and mental health
- Contributions to the Black community
- Leadership and role models in the Black community
- Aspirations for the Black community
- Perceptions of the Black community
- Media representation and media portrayal of Blacks
- Perceptions of unfair treatment of Blacks in the GTA
- Personal experience as a Black person
- Experience with institutions
- Experience with and perceptions of Police
- Criminal Justice System
- Spiritual values and religion
- Sexuality and gender identity
- Demographics

The issue of the split samples elicited some comments in the debrief and raised some concerns since it took some getting used to for many of the researchers. But many indicated that once they had mastered the survey, they were very comfortable doing the interviews, because they knew when and where to skip to the relevant section of the questionnaire.

Some researchers indicated that many survey questions seemed prescribed based on the assumptions underlying them. There was limited room to pursue prompts because of the time, or the design of some of the questions. It was also reported that a lot of the respondents did not understand the questions about sexual orientation and identification, while others resisted responding to questions about Black LGBTQ community, child poverty or mental health.

The point was also made that the project needed to acknowledge the fact that some members of the Black community did not speak English. This included French speaking Black community members but also those who spoke limited English in communities like the Somali community, or those with distinctive dialects.

It is no doubt that this breadth of inquiry would be challenging even over a period of one and half hours. But the research design seems to have attempted to balance the need to do a deep

reading of the experience as well as a broad set of dimensions of that experience. It appears that given the fact that there were one thousand and five hundred interviews done, most reporting minimal challenges, that some form of balance was achieved. The data analysis and findings represent another opportunity to test this proposition.

The use of response card

The project created and encouraged researchers to use response cards to facilitate and speed up the process of moving respondents through sections and to avoid hesitation when it came to dealing with split samples. They were set out systematically by section and question and they applied to the scale questions. They were used for every interview – and had indications showing Card A to Card G. One of the suggestions was to offer the participant the card and ask them for a response. The alternative was to read out the scale to the respondent and ask them to make a choice.

Given the mix of open and close ended as well as a number of scale questions, this represented an important innovation for the study. Community researchers indicated that in the main the response cards worked as expected and moved the interview along. They saved the interviewer from having to constantly read out the list of options and gave clarity to the respondents who chose to read it themselves.

Benefits to the community

Researchers indicated that the question they heard the most was what the outcome and the benefits would be for the community from the research project. While they asked the question, most indicated an optimism about the projects outcomes, believing that the findings would provide the community and decision makers key information they need to advocate for and make policy decisions that will address some of the challenges the community faces.

In terms of a process that would mobilize such knowledge, a number suggested that a unifying event could be organized to bring many of the respondents and others together to hear about the findings and to discuss how they can be used for action for change. They called for ‘something very grand’ to show the community at its best and to give it a chance to strategize, plan and build for the future.

There was some recognition that some of the hiring represented important employment for especially young people in the community and that they also picked up skills that can be used on other research projects. The exposure to the community also means that some researchers will become involved in initiative and community activities they did not know existed before. In which case the project has provided a civic duty by connecting people to projects ongoing.

Community researcher skills acquisition is another area of benefit to the community. The participation of community researchers at a minimum means that there is a cohort of community involved members who have a base of skills and experience that can be brought to inquiring into other socially relevant questions. These can play a critical role in the social action phase of the process of knowledge mobilization. Other possible benefits could come from how the community utilizes the data for its own development.

XI. Observations and best practices

The data collection process was part of a broader research project that has demonstrated or generated a number of best practices. The principles outlined at the outset of the project are a key best practice and as the evaluation has indicated, they were demonstrated through the key phases of the data collection process. There were a few others worth highlighting:

Institutional-Community Partnership

The project has demonstrated that it is possible to have a viable institutional-community partnership involving a historically vulnerable community and mainstream organizations and institutions, one that leads to positive outcomes for all involved. In this case the Institute and its partners were able to develop a strong partnership which promised benefits for the institutions and the community as a whole. There was a unique opportunity for institutional partners to work with a community that is 'not usually heard from' while demonstrating the value of research as a community building enterprise. The practice represents precisely the kind of reciprocity that is increasingly expected of action research. This represents a key best practice

Project Phasing

Another best practice obtained in the phasing process, which allowed the project to engage the community in the early phase to establish credibility for for the project. That engagement was instrumental in opening the door for the second round of engagement involving recruitment of community researchers and participants. For a community based approach this engagement was crucial to the success of the data collection process.

Research advisory committee

The use of a research advisory committee represents an important practice in community based research. It is recommendation that the community be represented in key positions of influence in the decision making process for the project. In this case the advisory committee while struck after the research question was determine, nevertheless was instrumental in some decisions about methodology and the development of the survey instrument. These aspects of decision making represent an important signal to the community about the project's commitment to ensure that research was guided by input from the community. It also provides the project with the benefit of the unique perspectives brought by members of the advisory.

Media engagement and community presence/penetration

A vibrant media campaign was an essential part of the community engagement and public education necessary to raise the consciousness of the Black community to the existence and value of the Black Experience Project. It also helped define the project in the public imagination and made it easier for the recruitment of community researchers and ultimately the participants whose narratives are represented in the 1,500 interviews conducted by the project. The learning here relates to the value of presenting a competing story about the black experience in the imagination of the public but also a posture of positive action to attract the attention and interest of members of the Black community who are often skeptical of the research process given their previous experiences with it.

Blog – Profiles and Articles

The coordination team started a Black Experience Project Blog that became an open and accessible space where updates on the project were shared by members of the team as well as community researchers. It became a platform for contributing such things as profiles about themselves and the work they were doing in the community or articles about their experiences or issue of interest. The space enabled people to feel more invested and connected to the project and was an additional site of affirmation for their experiences. It also became a channel for updates about the project that is still available to those who were at some point or other involved in the project and maintain an interest in it.

XII. Conclusion

This summative evaluation utilized a logic model to evaluate the outcomes of the data collection project measured against the articulated expectations set out by the project. We were interested in measuring and better understanding what was accomplished by looking at the goals, expectations, and principles underlying the project. Secondly, the evaluation looked at the actual process of data collection and implementation and possibly impact of the process on the community. Using a set of tools, it determined the effectiveness of the data collection process and identified some key best practices and challenges that had to be overcome to ensure the success of the process.

There are any number of reflections about the data collection process that indicate its success and the value of the lessons learnt. The evaluation relied on the reflections shared by key participants in the process through a debrief session, a survey and feedback from members of the co-ordination team. As well, it measured the outcomes against pronounced expectations, focusing on the ways in which the project set out its rationale for a particular process of data collection and how that the operationalization of the methodology affirmed that rationale. So a key focus was the community based research approach and the use of community researchers as an important means by which to achieve meaningful participation by the community in the project. It also demonstrated that institutional-community arrangements can effectively facilitate the study of ‘communities on the margins’ of society. It means that those communities that least heard from can be provided the means by which they can ‘speak’.

The quantitative achievement of 1,500 interviews probably speaks loudest to the success of the choices made. But so do the qualitative assessments of the benefits accruing to the community and to the community researchers and participants in the project, as well as the community building side effects of the mobilization involved in the Black Experience Project. The limitations identified also represent an opportunity for learning and improvement in the data collection model employed. Survey complexity, recruitment challenges, coordination staff management, fuller training regimes, and the management of communication with participants and researchers are areas of necessary improvement that can benefit for the experience of the BEP.

The evaluation identified successes, best practises and challenges related to the data collection process. But the ultimate measure of the success of the project will be the findings that provide insights into the experience of Black community members in the greater Toronto Area.

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