

# Community-Academic Research Partnerships: Conditions for Ethical, Impactful Collaboration



by Pillar Nonprofit Network

## Persistent Challenges:

- Token Participation: Community partners are often included too late, with limited input on research design or analysis.
- Power Imbalances: Academia control terms of authorship, funding allocations, and timelines, while community contributions are undervalued
- Limited Budget for Community Engagement: Community roles are underfunded or unfunded, impeding true co-leadership
- Letters of Intent Without Promises of Equity: more on this below

## Shared Goals

Pillar and Western's RECAP Program are working together to shift who holds power in research so that knowledge is created with communities and where knowledge is used to fuel change, not just publication.

## Key Benefits:

- Collective Knowledge Creation: Research questions are more relevant and grounded when informed by lived experience and on-the-ground expertise. Collection of more accurate and nuanced data.
- Greater Impact: Community partnerships increase real-world application and uptake of findings, particularly among equity-deserving groups.
- Mutual Capacity Building: Universities gain insight into local systems and networks, while community organizations benefit from access to research, evaluation, and dissemination tools.
- Policy Influence: Data co-developed with community actors carries weight with policymakers and funders and strengthens advocacy efforts.
- Stronger Pathways to Implementation: Accelerates translation of research to action.

## Minimum Requirements for Partnership and Support

### IT BEGINS WITH THE REQUEST FOR THE LETTER OF INTENT:

- Make reference to the existing relationship - this assumes that efforts have already been made to build trust.
- Provide a clarity on the organization's role, responsibilities, and contributions throughout the project lifecycle.
- Outline budget commitments, which include adequate funding for staff participation in research and knowledge mobilization activities.
- Include explicit support for Co-Authorship and Recognition, and transparent criteria for co-authorship.
- Declare commitments for ongoing communication and co-design, including a clear process for feedback, regular updates on milestones and timelines.
- Provide a clear Knowledge Mobilization plan for both internal and public audiences.
- Include a Letter of Promise with your Letter of Intent request, confirming your commitment to equitable collaboration and outlining how conflict will be addressed.