



Partnering Across the “Plaza”: A Systems Approach for Community-Academic Research to Improve Public Health

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Background

In the Autumn of 2009, a group of health sciences researchers, a local public health agency, a primary care Federally Qualified Health Center, and a coalition of community-based organization came together in response to a National Institutes of Health Funding Opportunity Announcement (RC4-OD—9-010) to improve community-linked research infrastructure. This presentation captures the core ideas of our ongoing collaborative effort. Funding is anticipated (1RC4RR031378-01).

Challenges

Addressing local community health issues requires collaboration. Theoretically-driven, evidence-based, culturally-relevant models may strengthen these partnerships. Challenges to doing this work include:

- Breaking out of institutional silos to create meaningful and sustained relationships to address health needs of the communities we serve
- A readiness and mutual trust among all partners to work collaboratively
- Developing capacity among all partners
- Having shared and integrated data systems to support the work of improving health.

A Systems Approach

We present here a model, adapted from the work of Kotter (1996), Richmond and Kotelchuck (1991) and Peck et al (2010), recently put into action to build sustainable community-linked research infrastructure. Unique to our systems approach is the crossing of institutional boundaries into the center of what we have come to call the “plaza”; a coming together of academia, government (i.e., public health agencies), community, and health services. It was the groups’ belief that it takes more than “two to tango.”

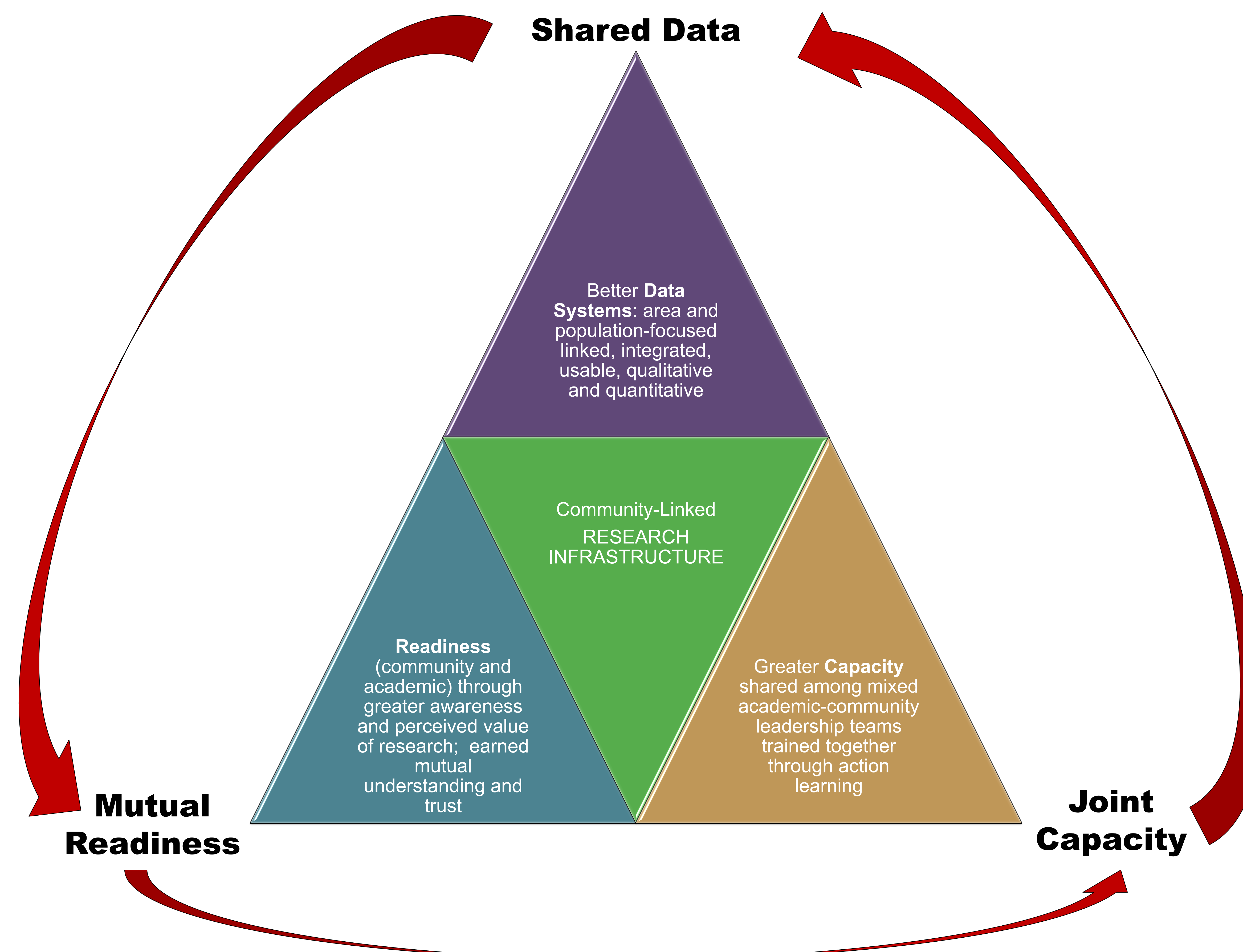
The center of the plaza brings together partner readiness to engage in research collaborations, linking data from all partners into one shared resource, and collaborative teams with the capacity to engage in research. The emerging plaza partnership has opened the doors for core local public health partners to more readily engage in health-improving activities that are based in empirical knowledge and performed by members of a trained and capable team that comes from all sides of the plaza.

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The Plaza Partnership



Community-Academic Research System



Anticipated Results

From this systems approach to developing community-academic partnerships to improve public health, the following shared products are anticipated:

- Trusting relationships across the plaza that are meaningful and sustained
- Collaborative products (i.e., community-based research agendas, shared data systems, robust and timely data that is usable)
- A community-linked research infrastructure designed to address local community health issues.

Potential Opportunities

Opportunities for Local Boards of Health based on this approach might include:

- Creating a plaza partnership in your own locale using an approach that supports engaging multiple partners in a collaborative setting (the plaza) that gives voice to all concerned parties
- Utilizing the plaza approach for building and sustaining trust among the constituents served by the local board of health – without trust, our best intervention and prevention efforts often fail to reach the intended audiences
- Developing a community-linked research infrastructure in collaboration with a local or regional university, community health care providers, and relevant community-based organizations that utilizes the readiness, capacity and data triangle for research aimed at improving the public's health

Which in turn may provide:

- Robust, timely, and usable data (e.g. Community Health report card, Integrated data systems to support collaborative research)
- Relevant and timely research that translates into healthier outcomes
- Greater and more effective translation of research into better health outcomes for the “community”

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