

CARL MANUAL

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Note: This document should be used in conjunction with the *CARL Research Process* flow chart.

Introduction

The aim of the manual is to assist civil society organisations (CSOs), students, supervisors and all those involved in the CARL Initiative at UCC in understanding and engaging with community-based research. This manual should be used as a guide rather than a rulebook.

The guide is in three parts; the first part refers to the initial meetings, whether it is with the community group or students. This is the most important element of the process as it lays the groundwork for later activities. The second part is focussed on the development of the research request, i.e. things to watch out for as the request progresses. The third part of the manual looks at the loose ends that need tidied up on completion of the research.

What is CARL?

The Community-Academic Research Links initiative, CARL, is located at University College Cork and invites non-profit voluntary or community organisations to suggest potential research topics that can be pursued by students on their behalf across a wide range of academic disciplines in UCC, and usually free of charge. CARL is based on the 'Science Shop' model and follows a 40 year European tradition with similar initiatives on-going in some of the highest ranked Universities in Europe and worldwide. CARL's mission is to provide independent, participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society.

What is a CSO?

CSO is an acronym for a Civil Society Organisation. We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees etc.

CARL Research Process Phases

There are a number of phases that are outlined in the next pages and on the *CARL Research Process* flow chart document (see website). This is only a guide and the following phases may not always follow in this order.

Phase 1: Community group poses research question(s)

When CSOs makes contact with the CARL coordinator, a number of research proposals are screened out immediately as they do not conform to the type of research undertaken through

CARL. Where a CSO request fits the aims, objectives and criteria of CARL, the CARL coordinator contacts the CSO to find out more:

*Initial Meetings with CSO - **Find Out** (CARL Coordinator and CSO Rep)*

1. **Who wants to know?** This includes both the organisation/group concerned and the person representing the group. In the latter case it can be important to check diplomatically how representative the individual is of the group and it is important to realise therefore that the group may not share the individual's perspective on the question. Also if the person represents a committee it might be useful to check whether and when the committee changes personnel as new members may view the request differently.
2. **What is the question?** Try to agree a written statement of the question - after negotiation this can change.
3. **What are the time constraints?** When does the work need to be completed by? Must it start by a certain date? Does it need to take place at a certain time of the year? Why are these constraints being imposed? Sometimes constraints are set arbitrarily and may actually be negotiable.
4. **Why is this question being asked?** Answering this should include deriving a context for the request. This information is important both in terms of the basic CARL criteria and for later use. Being aware of the need for the request will help sell the request, particularly to students.
5. **How might the information be used?** This overlaps with the previous question however it is more specific. What will the group do with the results? Is it a possibility or a probability that they can act on the results? More importantly, is the person asking the question the same person who will act on the results? This information is important in terms of reporting to the student or academic what happened to the work.
6. **What other assistance is being sought?** If other help is available will CARL no longer be needed, or is CARL input necessary to make things happen? The CARL coordinator needs to be careful that they don't take on the role of Community Development Officer - make your skills available and direct them to other resources when appropriate.
7. **Is money available?** If money is available then it should be pointed out to the group that the CARL initiative cannot be used to undercut University research services.
8. **What support can be provided?** Will there be a direct contact person for the staff member or student who gets involved and what other inputs can the group make? For example accommodation, travel and provision of office space.

Criteria for the Acceptance of a Project

1. (Scientific) research possible.
2. Public results.
3. Relevant to number of people.
4. Client is able to use results.
5. Question is not commercial.
6. Cost share only if possible.

Criteria	Comment	Importance
1. Size of project: feasibility and manageability	To be checked and negotiable in individual cases	
2. Statutory organisation and their core business	Not to be support in general	
3. Individuals and individuals within organisations	Problematic, especially as it may involve CARL being drawn into conflicts within organisation	
4. Simple evaluation	At least, not if it is evaluation of service delivery etc. by an organisation	
5. Degree of determination of guiding questions, methodology and outcome by asking organisation	It has to be formulated in an open way, allowing the field to be explored rather than exploring the ground for implementing a predefined task	
6. Point of reference is starting from people's life/living conditions – be it particular groups, communities, localities or from the interest of a specific organisation and/or delivery of service	It is important that point of reference is formulated not from a specific organisation's interest but it is made clear that it focuses on the interest (needs/problems ...) of people living in an area, specific groups etc.	MOST IMPORTANT AND DECISIVE

CARL Coordinator - Point out to CSOs

1. CARL is an intermediary - it does not answer research questions except in the most straightforward of cases. We do not 'represent' students or staff.
2. If undergraduates carry out the research the output can have variable standards and there are limitations to what individual students can achieve.
3. There will always be delays before the next action.
4. If any of the CSOs' circumstances change then CARL needs to be kept informed.

Document all of the above information as soon as possible after the initial meeting. Open a new file for the request and store information as per the information systems set up.

CARL Coordinator: Developing the request

Important things to remember

1. Write everything down - there are too many requests to keep details in your head. Record who rang whom, what they said, what information they said they would forward etc. Send written confirmation of any agreements made over the phone.
2. Most things can be renegotiated - if an aspect of a request presents problems (timing, location, size etc) explore other possibilities.
3. People will not always return your phone calls - call again after a few days, be persistent.
4. Do not put all your eggs in one basket - although a good initial contact may have been made it is good practice to make other contacts.

5. Emphasize the name CARL - representatives of community CSOs may sometimes think of you as an academic and the academics may see you as part of a research centre.

Phase 1: CARL Advisory Group

CARL Advisory Group

Terms of reference

The terms of reference of the CARL Advisory Group are as follows:

1. To advise on the feasibility of projects. The final decision to take on a project rests with the CARL committee and may also depend on resources available at that time.
2. To provide advice to the CARL committee on the management, organization, structure and general support for the CARL initiative.
3. To promote the CARL initiative and encourage involvement amongst CSO and University staff.
4. The Advisory Group should meet at least once a year, with the main advisory meeting taking place no later than the first Friday in September.
5. Where possible, the Advisory Group meeting venue should rotate between university and community locations.

Membership

- a. 3 x members of the CARL committee.
- b. 3 x representatives from CSO sector, with a preference for CSO members who represent umbrella CSOs.
- c. 1x member that has participated in a previous CARL project (student and / or CSO link member).
- d. 1-2 x members from local municipalities (HSE, City and or County Council).
- e. 1-2 x student representatives (students from eligible courses, student reps or from central student's union).
- f. Chair and secretary to be appointed for 2-year period. Secretary, where possible, should be from the CARL committee.
- g. Quorum = 4 members of committee (including 2 from CARL committee).

Phase 2: Identification of student(s) and supervisor(s)

Student Requirements

1. MSW projects begin May (draft proposals), they return to college/placement in September when recruitment for CARL projects begins. Students submit a more developed research proposal in December and most of the work will be undertaken from January to end of April at the latest. Project size: 5-6 interviews or 2 focus groups, 10,000 word dissertation, must do a postgraduate conference paper in May. Students must have an average grade score of 60% or higher **and** must get a letter of recommendation from their tutor.

2. MSocSc Social Policy: Sept – Sept. Project size: 8 interviews max or 3 focus groups max, 30,000 word dissertation).
3. Master of Third Sector Management: Sept – Sept. Project size: 6-7 interviews, 3 focus groups, 15,000 word dissertation.

Phase 3: Research Agreement Planning Meeting/ “3-way meeting”

Research Agreement Planning Meeting

Attendance: Student(s), CSOs representative(s), CARL Coordinator + maybe College Supervisor

University Staff

Initial meetings - Find Out:

1. **What deadlines the students work to?** When do they finally decide on a project? When will work begin, when can fieldwork take place and when might the final project be delivered?
2. **Any minimum course requirements.** For example, some students need a psychological input into a study, some must use scales in a questionnaire or some may be expected to be placed in the organisation for a period of time.
3. **Extra information requirements** - sometimes academics/students will require extra information in order to answer the question.
4. **Will this project need to be reviewed by the agency or University ethics committee?**
Social Research Ethics Committee – www.ucc.ie/research/rio/ethics.html

Initial meetings - Point out

1. What the question is, what the time constraints are, who wants to know etc - all the information derived from the initial meeting with the community group representative.
2. There may be some scope for adapting the questions; breaking it up if it is too complicated, adding parts in if it is too simple. This is important as students may get bogged down and feel if they cannot answer the exact question then there is no point in doing the project - this is not the case.
3. The role of the CARL coordinator is to ensure the smooth running of the project and acting as a reference point to both the community group and the student/academic if there are any difficulties.

Students

Initial meetings - Find Out

1. What are the main concerns voiced by the student? What type of support might they require? Is there additional training or support available within the University to support them e.g. library training on database/journal searches, Departmental training on use of statistical analysis software etc.

Initial meetings - Point Out

1. There is support available from CARL coordinator/committee and the community or voluntary group to help the student while they are carrying out the project.
2. There are special circumstances and considerations for working with community and voluntary CSOs and on a real request. The question can change and develop. The need to develop good working relationships might also be referred to and remember, personalities will vary from request to request. It is essential to remain in continuous contact with CSO throughout project: updates, progress, negotiate issues arising, seek advice and knowledge from CSO, update on possible changes/challenges, and so on.
3. The advantages of working directly with a community group on a project:
 - Helping the community
 - Answering a real question
 - Having the support of the CARL coordinator/committee and the CSO
 - Seeing the results of their labour put to use
 - Unlocking data

Phase 4: Follow-up, dissemination and publications

Upon Completion of Research

1. Keep evidence of what was produced. A copy of the completed project is to be passed on to the commissioning group and a copy kept in the CARL archives. Copy of report to be placed on the CARL website <http://carl.ucc.ie>
2. Notify interested parties of completion and discuss with CSO how to implement findings and recommendations.
3. Let the students and academics know what the information was used for.
4. Arrange publicity if desired.
5. If appropriate, establish if CSO and student representative are interested in staying involved in CARL work through the advisory group, as local contacts or to provide references/feedback.

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Prepared by

UCC CARL Committee

Version History

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