

Williamstown CARES

Community Safety & Wellbeing Assessment



WILLIAMSTOWN CARES
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT & RESEARCH

Find out how you can be a part of the
Community Safety and Wellbeing Assessment!



EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO BUILD COMMUNITY
williamstownma.gov/community-research



History



These social workers have volunteered countless hours of valuable time and expertise over the past year to help develop this project, demonstrating a commitment to creating proactive, sustainable, and inclusive change in our community.

COMMUNITY, COLLABORATION

The Town of Williamstown is conducting a community-based participatory research project (CBPR) to learn more about public safety in our town. The CBPR approach starts with and includes the community, which means that community members start and participate in every step of the process.

The Williamstown CARES project began organically, in July 2020, when a group of local social workers met with then Town Manager Jason Hoch to discuss potential solutions to challenges in policing and to explore the possibility of a social work program to serve unmet community needs. The Town Manager appointed this group to serve as an ongoing social work advisory committee.

In collaboration with this group, the Town hired Research Director for Community Assessment and Engagement Jennifer James to design and implement a study on safety and wellbeing in Williamstown.

The social work advisory committee launched the Community Safety and Wellbeing Assessment with a mailing sent to every mailbox in Williamstown and outreach at the June 9, 2021 Town Meeting.

Immediately following this initial publicity, nearly 100 participants registered to be interviewed. Since then, more community members have registered. It is estimated that the project will involve interviews with several hundred participants.

Benefits



What are the benefits of conducting this assessment?

Williamstown CARES is a win-win project for the community and town government at a time when a mutually beneficial and inclusive project is called for.

As a community based participatory research project, this study provides all community members the opportunity to constructively use their voices to build an evidence base for positive community change.

Policy and program recommendations will be grounded in community-generated data along with conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative data drawn from relevant existing research on potential solutions.

The results will be presented in a thorough report that will speak to all community members' concerns, regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum or what opinions they hold about the challenges of the past year.

In fact, this project is a model of inclusive and transparent problem solving. Many community members who have expressed significant concern about recent town scandals and about the trustworthiness of town government have cited significant support for this project.

In addition, this work opens the door to new state and federal funding streams. Preparing data for implementation stage grant proposals gives us the best opportunity to identify, fund, and create solutions.

Outcomes of the project will likely garner positive attention for the Town and provide a replicable model for change processes to help other communities solve similar problems.



Regarding scale: A study with fewer than 100 participants is of a different scale than one involving 150 participants, 300 participants, 500 participants, and so on. To date, nearly 150 community members have registered, and additional outreach is planned to ensure that all interested voices are heard.

HOW IT WORKS

The project's **scope** is defined by the nature of the problems being studied (community safety and wellbeing) along with careful consideration of existing research, theories, methods, and community input.

The project's **scale** is determined by the number of research participants. Because this is a community-based participatory research project, grounded in commitments to equity and inclusion, its scale is determined by the community itself, as all community members are invited to share their perspectives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The project's **design** includes both methodology and methods. Experienced researchers have designed this particular project based on community input and knowledge of a variety of potential methodologies and methods.

Qualitative interviewing, which is one of the primary methods used in this study, takes time, as people respond to open-ended questions rather than a survey with a set of predetermined answers.

The interview guide is designed to take approximately one hour, but the length of interviews truly depends on each interview participant. Some people may need more time than others, depending on their experiences and how much information they wish to share.

This means that interviews need to be scheduled with sufficient time windows to account for some variability in length. In addition, each interview involves setup time, data collection, data upload, and equipment maintenance tasks.

We sincerely appreciate your patience with this process as we take the time to speak with each community member who wishes to participate.

FAQ

WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH IS THIS?

This community assessment uses a community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework and a qualitative research design to bring together the strengths of the community—empowering citizens to define problems and explore solutions—with the expertise of researchers who can interpret and use existing research and measure outcomes to ensure that new programs and policies meet community goals.

In addition to interviews with community members, researchers will interview police officers and review statistics and policies to evaluate the role of police in supporting community safety and wellbeing in Williamstown.

Finally, a working group will explore program innovations in other communities to inform ideas for program and policy changes that will enhance safety and wellbeing in our town.

This research has been designed by qualified experts. It does not use the sampling or quantitative methods of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) because that framework is inappropriate for a community needs assessment.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

ALL community members have the opportunity to share their thoughts about what Williamstown needs to be a safe and welcoming community.

Flexible interview options (at home, at Town Hall, outside, Zoom, telephone) are in place to make sure the study reaches as many residents as possible, and all interviews will be included in data analysis and subsequent recommendations.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STUDY?

After the community assessment, police assessment, and policy and program assessment have been completed, the research director will write a thorough report including the following:

- Background
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Results
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

This report will be shared broadly throughout the community.

Then the research director will identify state and federal grant funding streams to help minimize the financial impact of implementing new programs.

She will also submit an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal to raise the profile of the town and the work given the importance of developing replicable models as communities face similar challenges all over the country.

FAQ

WHY INTERVIEWS?

The main goal of the interviews is to understand how community members think about safety and wellbeing (their own and that of others) in Williamstown.

We know that these are complex and nuanced issues and that different community members will have different perceptions based on their own experiences.

For this reason, researchers will conduct in-depth interviews with community members that will provide a richer and more accurate perspective on community needs than a survey involving questions with predetermined sets of answers.

WHO WILL INTERVIEW ME?

A professionally educated social worker who has been trained in conducting research interviews will conduct your interview.

There are currently seven social workers connected with this project, one of whom will contact you to schedule your interview. For more information about members of the research team, visit <https://williamstownma.gov/community-research/who/>

IS THIS CONFIDENTIAL?

Why do you need my name/address/age?

1. These interviews have to be scheduled individually, so we need contact details to make those arrangements.

2. Researchers need to make sure participants are Williamstown residents.

3. Researchers must obtain consent from every participant, which necessitates the use of names.

4. Birth dates are required so that researchers know to seek parental permission from anyone under 18.

WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE RECORDED?

The recording, which is not associated with your contact information, will be transcribed and uploaded into Atlas, a software tool that will help researchers perform thematic and content analysis within a single transcript and common themes arising across transcripts as part of the data analysis process. Recording and transcribing interviews will allow researchers to capture the depth and complexity of community members' perceptions in their own words.

JOIN US IN MAKING THIS STUDY A SUCCESS.



To register, visit:

<https://williamstownma.gov/community-research/how>

Or contact Jennifer for help with the form:

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