

# Merging Scientific and Advocate Communities: The Transdisciplinary Research Model in the BCERC



Kami J. Silk, Ph.D.  
Department of Communication  
Michigan State University

# Objectives

- Explain the BCERC and its transdisciplinary model
- Present challenges associated the model
- Provide strategies for addressing some challenges

# Breast Cancer and Environment Research Centers (BCERC)

## **Collaborative research centers comprised of:**

- multidisciplinary teams of scientists, clinicians, and breast cancer advocates work together on a
- unique set of scientific questions that focus on
  - chemical, physical, biological, and social factors in the environment that
  - work together with genetic factors and lead to breast cancer

# BCERC

**The overall goal is to develop public health messages for:**

- young girls and women who are at high risk for breast cancer
- about the role(s) of specific environmental stressors in breast cancer
- and how to reduce exposures to these stressors

# BCERC

## Four Centers Funded

- Michigan State University
- University of Cincinnati
- University of Pennsylvania/Fox Chase Cancer Center
- University of California, San Francisco

# BCERC

## Center Cores

- Epidemiological (except MSU)
- Biological
- Community Outreach and Translation Core (COTC)

# The Transdisciplinary Model

## Steering Committee

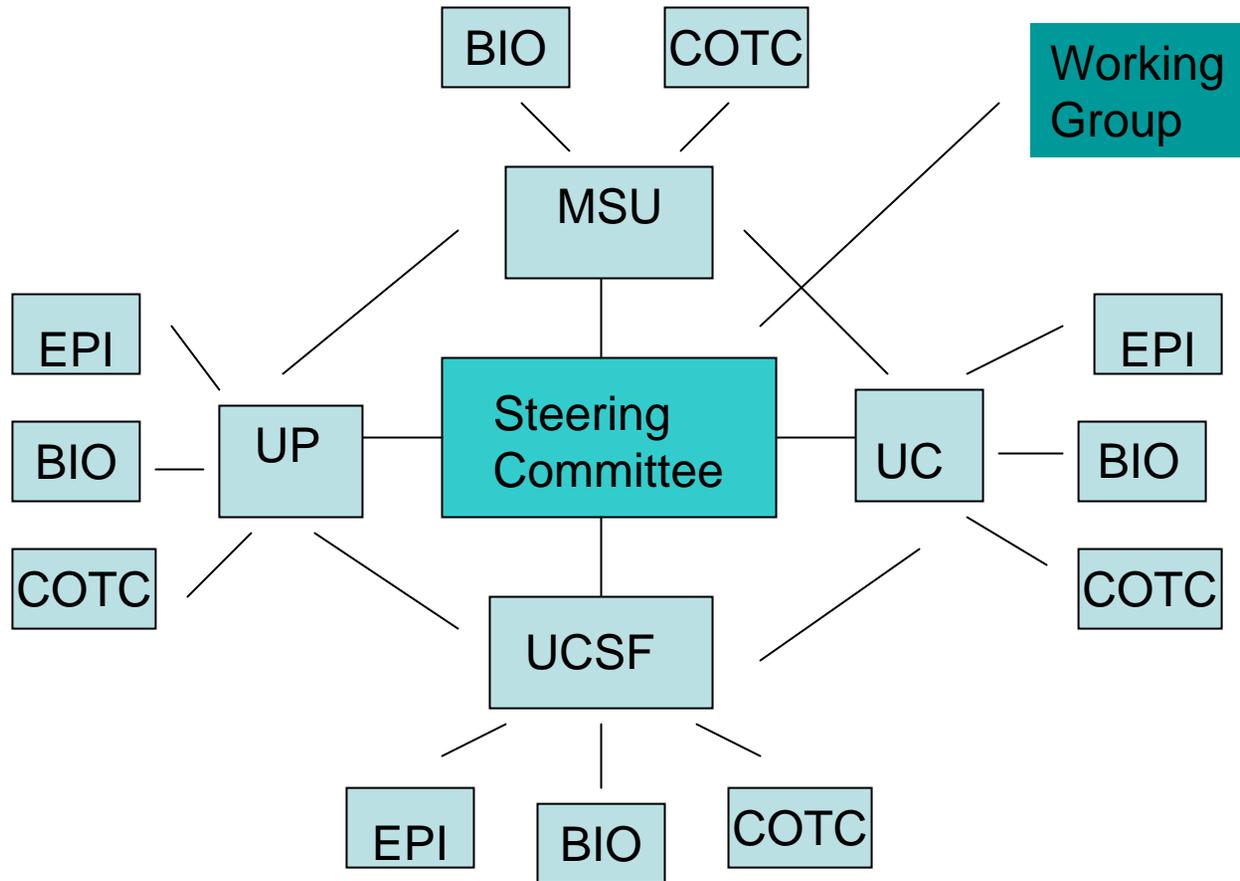
- Governs network by setting priorities for individual centers and collaborative projects.
- Composition
  - Director and member of COTC from each Center
  - NCI & NIEHS Program staff

# The Transdisciplinary Model

## Working Group (WG)

- Advises the BCERC network on progress and complementary opportunities in other disciplines
- Makes recommendations
- Meets annually with steering committee
- Composition of Nominated Members

# Rough Organizational Model



# Trans-Challenges

- Integration
- Time
- Administration
- Interaction
- Evaluation
- Funding

(Source: BCERC members)

# Trans-Challenges

- Inherent Site Differences
- Building Trust
- Lack of a Model
- Advocates and researchers have different goals.
- Advocates as Volunteers
- Work Processes

(Source: BCERC members)

# Strategies to Address Challenges

- Monthly conference calls
- Biannual face-to-face planning meetings
- Funding grants longer than 5 years
- Some efforts to evaluate
- Supplemental Funding

# Strategies to Address Challenges

- Input sought across projects
- Committee structure
- Shared authorship and collaboration on writing projects
- A “pioneer” attitude adopted.
- An assumption of “synergy”

# Final Thoughts

- Great NIEHS & NCI support for model
- Evidence of “synergy” in types of RQs being asked
- Evaluation of the model is indeed difficult
- Great productivity in terms of papers and publications
- Technology can not replace face-to-face interactions

# Final Thoughts

- Researchers and advocates bring specific “ways of knowing” to the table, all are valid
- Gaining the “local knowledge” generated by advocates is essential to informed research processes
- Transdisciplinary research is a novel model that has yet to be supported

# Questions?

Go to [www.bcerc.org](http://www.bcerc.org) for more information.