

Principles for Working with Communities

Guidelines and recommendations for consideration for collaborative community engagement in public health projects.

Land Acknowledgement

As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that Manhattan, New York (10027), rests on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Lenape (Lenapehoking). We recognize the Lenape people as the original stewards of this land and honor their enduring presence, resilience, and cultural contributions.

Acknowledging that we live and work on Indigenous homelands reminds us of the deep relationships Indigenous peoples maintain with these lands, shaped by sophisticated knowledge systems rooted in community, sustainability, and interdependence. We honor the contributions of Native peoples to fields including medicine, governance, the arts, engineering, and community well-being.

We affirm the ongoing ties Indigenous nations have to their traditional homelands and recognize the painful history of dispossession, forced displacement, and systemic inequity that continues to affect Native communities. We respect the many Indigenous peoples still connected to this land, and we honor the ancestors and their living descendants who continue to shape this place.

CUNY-SPH-HHI commits to advancing educational opportunities, strengthening partnerships, and supporting initiatives that center Indigenous histories, contemporary experiences, sovereignty, and self-determination.

Labor Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the foundations of the United States, the City of New York, and our most established institutions were built through the exploitation of enslaved people. These individuals were violently uprooted, forced into labor, and stripped of their basic human rights, shaping the economic and physical landscape of Manhattan and the nation.

We also recognize that immigrant labor, both voluntary and involuntary, has been systematically undervalued, exploited, and met with inequitable treatment. Their time, skill, and sacrifices have powered this city, only to be erased, overlooked, or underappreciated.

We express deep gratitude to the generations whose labor, resistance, and resilience continue to shape our lives and communities today.

CUNY-SPH-HHI is committed to community engagement, policy development, ongoing education, and equitable practices as we work to confront and rectify the historic and present-day injustices that continue to shape our society.

Core Values and Representation of Values

Core Values	Representation
Equity	Share decision-making and initiative leadership as often as possible Treat participants with integrity and respect
Racial and Social Justice	Work to undo racism and other injustices to advance fair opportunities and outcomes for all residents, particularly those who are marginalized
Resident Power and Inclusion	Prioritize the expertise of city residents most affected by inequities when identifying health challenges and developing lasting solutions
Accountability	Build processes that are responsive to feedback from those we work with Be willing to change and adapt throughout the process
Transparency	Communicate openly about motives, resources, power dynamics, and decision-making processes. Acknowledge challenges and limitations, and also work openly to address challenges and limitations while maintaining community members' trust
Sustainability	Continually reflect, assess, and communicate to maintain and deepen relationships for long-term action. Allocate adequate resources to maintain relationships with communities over the long term
Capacity Building	Increase community involvement, impact, trust, and communication by improving coordination, enhancing existing services, advocating for policy change, and learning through pilots.

Communities are never perfect, but they count. They and their citizenry are key to improving everything from education and economic development to health care and race relations.

- Careful planning and Preparation. Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organization, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.
- Inclusion and Demographic Diversity. Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.
- Collaboration and Shared Purpose. Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.
- Openness and Learning. Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate community engagement activities for effectiveness.
- Transparency and Trust. Be transparent and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.
- Impact and Action. Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential.
- Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture. Promote a culture of participation through programs and institutions that support ongoing, high-quality community engagement.

Addressing community issues, whether it is downtown revitalization, community planning, or managing invasive animals or plants, is complex and cannot be effectively addressed without engaging stakeholders and community members. Engaging a community to address any issue is a long-term process, not a one-time event.

The community engagement facilitator will need to inform citizens and stakeholders about the project and gather their input. You will need to understand citizens' and stakeholders' concerns, aspirations, and ideas for undertaking the project. All this effort will be of little value unless the engagement process identifies stakeholders and citizens willing to help implement the solution. Planning your community engagement will increase your ability to:

- Inform citizens and stakeholders about your project and/or goals.
- Gather input from citizens and stakeholders regarding their opinions and support for, and assessment of, various actions, goals, and priorities.
- Help you better understand and consider citizens and stakeholders' concerns, aspirations, and ideas for addressing your specific needs.

- Assist you in identifying alternatives, consequences, and preferred solutions.
- Help you identify stakeholder groups, leaders, and citizens who can guide decision-making and contribute to implementation or contribute to solutions.

Effective and Respectful Community Engaged Partnerships and Projects

1. Partnerships use clear definitions created from discussion with all partners and agreed upon by all partners. In particular, definitions should cover group, values, purpose, mission, goals, outcomes, timeline, commitment, governance structure, and sustainability plan.
2. Partners should have mutual trust, respect, and commitment.
3. Partnerships need to build on identified strengths and assets. Instead of approaching a community-based partnership solely by listing the community's problems, partners should identify its strengths and assets.
4. Good partnerships should have clear communication among partners and transparency in decision-making.
5. Partnerships evolve through feedback from and among all partners.
6. Partnership roles, norms, and processes should evolve from the input and agreement of all partners. Partnerships need a governance structure that establishes a common understanding of how to proceed.
7. Successful partnerships have relationships with local leaders and funding agencies.
8. Effective partnerships leverage existing structures, such as schools and worksites, to integrate solutions into their missions.

Community Engaged Research

1. Investigators and communities understand what CER means.
2. The community-investigator partnership is strong.
3. Communities and investigators share power and responsibility equitably.
4. Diverse perspectives and populations are represented equitably.
5. The research goals are clear and relevant.
6. The research project results in mutual benefit for all partners.
7. Communities and investigators have opportunities to build capacity.
8. All partners receive equal respect.
9. Communications are continuous.
10. The monitoring and evaluation process is transparent.
11. The partners establish appropriate policies regarding ownership and dissemination of results.
12. The partners translate the research findings into policies, interventions, or programs.
13. The partners sustain the relationship and the research outcomes after the project ends.

Writing or Evaluating Community Engaged Projects, Grant Applications, and Manuscripts

1. Peer reviewers understand and have experience conducting research that involves community engagement, as defined by COPR.
2. Peer reviewers understand the value added by public review panel members.
3. The application provides evidence of an equitable partnership between the investigators and the community partner.
4. In the application, the investigators have defined the relevant community or communities.
5. In the application, the academic coinvestigators have identified the appropriate community or communities for the project, and the community coinvestigator has identified the appropriate research partner.
6. Community engagement is integral to the research described in the application.
7. The community played an appropriate and meaningful role in developing the application.
8. The application calls for an appropriate division of funding among partners.
9. The research project described in the application is based on sound science.
10. The project described in the application includes training opportunities.
11. The project described in the application will be conducted in an appropriate environment.
12. The project described in the application will have a measurable impact.

Six C's of successful Community engagement.

These include ensuring:

1. Capability: The members are capable of dialogue.
2. Commitment: Mutual benefit beyond self-interest.
3. Contribution: Members volunteer, and there is an environment that encourages members to 'have a go' or take responsibility/risks.
4. Continuity: Members share or rotate roles, and as members move on, a transition process sustains and maintains the community's corporate memory.
5. Collaboration: Reliable interdependence. A clear vision with members operating in an environment of sharing and trust.
6. Conscience: Embody or invoke guiding principles/ethics of service, trust, and respect that are expressed in the actions of the community.

The six-Cs can be seen as either targets or as filters to measure the functioning of the community or the engagement process in general.

Engagement Plan Steps

The following steps will help you develop your engagement plan.

1. Frame the issue or problem: The first step in developing your community engagement plan is to frame the issue or problem in a way that allows the community to discuss alternatives, solutions, and consequences. Take care not propose a specific solution to the issue or project. (ex. Enhancing your opportunities - rather than youth curfews, retail development strategies - rather than the proposed "big-box" store, waste management options - rather than the proposed landfill, invasive animal management - rather than baiting)

2. Identify your engagement goals - Why do you need or want people to get involved in your project? What do you want to accomplish by getting people involved? You will likely identify a mix of goals to include in your plan. Consider the following question to help you identify your goals:
3. Inform--Do you want to inform people about a project, or help them understand a problem or opportunity? Do you need more information from citizens to make a decision? What are the key things you want stakeholders to understand? What do they need to know to make this effort successful? What information is missing?
4. Consult — Do you want to gather public feedback on a project, program, or decision? Do you want to stimulate public debate about the issue? What specific types of information do you want from your participants? Is the goal to gather input into a pre-developed proposal simply, or is it general perceptions and values related to the issue you are seeking to address?
5. Involve — Do you want to work directly with citizens throughout the decision-making process, drawing on their knowledge and expertise to make recommendations? If you are expecting stakeholders to make decisions, what specifically do they have the purview over? How will their input be incorporated into the process or outcomes?
6. Collaborate — Do you want to create long-term partnerships among stakeholders (participants and community groups) to implement the solutions they develop? What specific contributions and partnerships do you want from your stakeholders? What can they realistically contribute? What authority are you willing to relinquish if necessary?
7. Empower--Do you want the public to take leadership for implementing actions that address the purpose? What specifically do you expect stakeholders to do on their own?
8. Communication plan – What is your plan for maintaining open lines of communication between you and those being engaged?

Develop Your Engagement Project Team

At this stage, it is a good idea to develop a project team or advisory group to help plan and implement your engagement process. The team's responsibilities might include:

- Selecting tools and designing the process for citizen participation
- Identifying and recruiting participants
- Publicizing the effort
- Developing background information
- Designing benchmarks and criteria for evaluation
- Reporting the outcomes of the process
- Making recommendations based on the outcomes

Identify the face-to-face tools for engaging citizens and stakeholders.

Several face-to-face tools and processes can help engage citizens and stakeholders in your efforts. These tools serve to achieve different engagement goals: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, or Empower. The trick is to select the engagement tool(s) and processes that match your goals and capacity to implement the appropriate strategies. A few of the more commonly used methods are identified in the section titled Pick the Right Tools.

Participant recruitment and retention

Develop a participant recruitment and retention plan that describes how you will reach, prepare for, and communicate with your target audience.

Evaluation plan - Identify your evaluation strategy. How will you measure if you've been successful? What constitutes success for the engagement team and the participants?