Partnering with Communities in Coalition Work

Background

This resource helps coalitions work together with community members. Community members include people who live in the communities the coalition serves and have direct experience with issues the coalition is addressing. This resource introduces ways to help coalitions understand, plan for, and improve their current community engagement efforts.

Understanding current community engagement work

The spectrum of community engagement to ownership can help your coalition understand how you are currently partnering with community members.

Figure 1. The spectrum of community engagement to ownership

Stance toward community	IGNORE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	DEFER TO
Impact	**Marginalization**	**Placation**	**Tokenization**	**Voice**	**Delegated power**	**Community ownership**
Community engagement goal	Deny access to decision-making	Provide the community with information	Gather input from the community	Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process and inform planning	Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementing decisions	Foster democratic participation and equity through community-driven decision-making
Message to community	*Your voice, needs, and interests do not matter*	*We will keep you informed*	*We care what you think*	*You are making us think (and therefore act) differently about the issue*	*Your leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue*	*It's time to unlock collective power and capacity for transformative solutions*
Example activities	-Closed-door meeting	-Fact sheets -Open houses -Presentations	-Public comment -Surveys	-Community organizing and advocacy -Interactive workshops	-MOUs with community-based organizations -Citizen advisory committees	-Community-driven planning -Participatory action research and budgeting

Adapted from Spectrum of community engagement to ownership, developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power.
MOU = memorandum of understanding.

Preparing for community engagement

The tips below will help your coalition prepare for new or enhanced community engagement work:

Consider why you want to engage the community. Think about how the community will make your coalition's work better. For example, will it help your programs fit the culture of the people you serve, increase community interest, or something else? Knowing this will help you understand the types of engagement that will be most useful.

Build on previous feedback from the community. Learn how others engaged community members on similar topics in the past (both through your coalition and outside your coalition). Building on past information shows community members that their ideas were heard and valued. Understanding what was successful or challenging in the past can also help you improve your work. Keep records of what you learned to help guide future coalition work.

Remove barriers to participation. Make sure your coalition's work is accessible to community members. Think about whether your coalition meets at a convenient time, pays community members for their work, offers translation services, or does other important things to make people feel included. For more information, see the *Recruiting and Engaging Coalition Members* resource.

Moving along the community engagement spectrum

Deepen your coalition's current work in community engagement in the following ways:

Show community members how you use their feedback. For example, if you currently ***consult*** the community through focus groups or surveys, consider ***involving*** community members in interpreting your findings. You can do this by presenting findings in a workshop or holding discussions about how findings can shape your coalition's work.

Look for ways to involve the community in planning and carrying out your coalition's work. If you are currently ***consulting*** community members after you launch an activity, consider how you can involve them earlier. For example, could you ***collaborate*** with them on planning or budgeting for future activities? Similarly, if you are collecting data from community members, could you ***collaborate*** with them to plan data collection or have them ***own*** parts of your data collection?

Key resource: Applying the spectrum of community engagement to ownership

This toolkit shares strategies for engaging community members at each step along the spectrum of community engagement to ownership.