Creating Health Equity Through Community Engagement

Plan4Health, February 5, 2016
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Community engagement is a process through which community members are empowered to own the change they want to see and involves communication, problem-solving, governance, and decision-making skills and strategies.

-PolicyLink, Kirwan Institute, 2012
Why engage the community?

- Honors most valuable resource => PEOPLE
- Fosters connectedness and trust
- Supports assessment
- Strengthens capacity
- Enhances effectiveness of interventions
- Promotes sustainability
Why is an equity lens important

• Not one-size fits all

• Equity does not “trickle down”

• Without being explicit = widening gaps and disparities
Assess and address organizational barriers
Organizational Barriers

- Time
- Financial resources
- Staff capacity and skills
- Partnerships
# Organizational Barriers: Time & Resources

## Determine level of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing Level of Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
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### Objective of the Approach

- **Inform**
  - To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions
  - Examples: Email newsletters, send press releases announcing progress milestones

- **Consult**
  - To gather feedback from targeted stakeholders on the project’s goals, processes, shared metrics, or strategies for change
  - Examples: Ask for input on initiative strategies, invite to small group or individual presentations about initiative

- **Involve**
  - To work directly with stakeholders continuously to ensure that concerns are consistently understood and considered
  - Examples: Invite to join Working Groups or an advisory body for the initiative, partner in policy advocacy

- **Collaborate**
  - To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and priorities
  - Examples: Appoint to a leadership role on a Working Group to help shape strategies

- **Co-Lead**
  - To place final decision-making in the hands of stakeholders so that they drive decisions and implementation of the work
  - Examples: Invite to join the Steering Committee and/or similar body with decision making power in the initiative

### Source:

*Collective Impact Forum, adapted from Tamarack Institute and IAP2*

Organizational Barriers: Staff Capacity & Skills

Applying an equity lens

- Assess the readiness of organization/coalition
  - Leadership support
  - Resources
  - Commitment to the (long-term) process
  - Willingness to be uncomfortable
Organizational Barriers: Staff Capacity & Skills

Applying an equity lens

- Define equity
- Understand disparities and inequities in your region and why they exist
- Name and address the “isms”
- Be explicit about equity outcomes
- Address root causes
- Ensure affected groups are “at the table”
Tools for understanding health inequities

- *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*
- *Race: The Power of An Illusion*
- NACCHO Roots of Health Inequity
- Harvard University: [Project Implicit](http://www.projectimplicit.org)
- APHA Racism and Health webinars
- Interaction Institute for Social Change webinars on equity and urban planning
Tools for understanding health inequities: Root Cause Mapping

**Figure 8. Root Cause Map**

**Outcomes**
- Too few calories out
- Too many calories in

**Causal Factors**
- Sedentary work
- Children can’t walk to school
- Little leisure-time physical activity
- Limited nutrition knowledge and information
- Access to calorie-dense, nutritionally poor foods
- Lack of access to healthy foods

**Root Causes**
- No sidewalks
- Fear of crime
- Fast moving traffic
- Many fast food outlets
- Limited transportation options
- No farmers’ market nearby
- No full service grocery stores nearby
- Zoning rules
- Consumer demand
- Infrequent public buses
- Unwilling to walk further
- Deed restrictions
- Disinvestment from poor neighborhoods
- Both parents work
- Time pressure
- No sidewalks
- Fear of crime

*Source: Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Governments*
Cultural Competence

- A continual learning process
- Focuses on three dimensions:
  - Awareness
  - Beliefs
  - Behaviors
Organizational Barriers: Staff Skills

Cultural Competence: Awareness

Ability to recognize and understand the reasons for the actions of individuals from one’s own and others’ cultures.

- Self
- Others cultural beliefs and behaviors
- Environment, social and economic factors
- Power relationships
- Individual differences
Organizational Barriers: Staff Skills

Cultural Competence: Beliefs

Judgments about the world that shape how individuals determine what information is valid and what sources are reliable.

- Valuing difference
- Suspending judgment
- Individuals act according to their own beliefs
Cultural Competence: Behaviors

Actions that flow from awareness and beliefs.

- Effective communication across cultures
- Seeking diversity in problem-solving
- Promote cultural competency in others
Organizational Barriers: Staff Skills

Strategies for Building Cultural Competence

• Dedicate resources for training

• Attend community meetings and cultural events as a participant

• Engage community-based organizations and other groups representative of the community

• Translate materials and provide interpreters at community meetings
Understand the history of the community
History of the community

• Historical injustices
  • Exclusionary policies and practices
  • Historical trauma

• Current climate
  • Community relations
  • Community – government relations
  • Gentrification
History of the community

• Past community engagement efforts
  • What has worked?
  • What hasn’t worked?

• Your organization’s engagement in the community
  • How is your organization perceived?
  • How are your partners perceived?
Build relationships early and consistently
Build relationships

- Authenticity takes time
- Consistency is key
- Involve community as early as possible
- Leverage partners with strong community relations
Select appropriate engagement techniques
Engagement Techniques

- Advisory Boards & Committees
- Health Impact Assessments
- Informal Open Houses/Exhibits
- Community Inventory
- Listening Circles
- Community Theatre & Arts
- Media Strategies
- Cultural Complementarity
- Public Meetings & Forums
- Cultural Competency Training
- Public Opinion Polling
- Decision-Making
- Storytelling
- Dialogue
- Study Circles
- Diversity Forums
- Surveys & Field Canvassing
- Focus Groups
- Visioning

Source: http://www.health.state.mn.us/communityeng/
Engagement Techniques: Technology

• How familiar is your audience with technology in general?

• Is the tool easy to use and intuitive?

• Is the technology transparent?

• Accessible to non-English speaking or low literacy community members

• Can communities use it use repeatedly?

• Could the use of the technology further alienate or intimidate users?
## Engagement Techniques

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Technique/tool</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early (pre-plan)</td>
<td>Idea gathering</td>
<td>One-on-one contact</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problem identification</td>
<td>“Working” meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community priorities</td>
<td>Root cause mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health impact assessment</td>
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<td>Community health needs assessment</td>
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<td>Focus group</td>
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<td>Use existing organizations: clubs, civic groups, etc.</td>
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<td>Telephone surveys</td>
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<td>Written surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far along (plan developed)</td>
<td>Revise plans</td>
<td>One-on-one contact</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build consent</td>
<td>“Working” meetings</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Advisory group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Audience response technology (keypads) forum</td>
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*Adapted from Getting started on citizen and stakeholder participation. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency: http://www.health.state.mn.us/communityeng/needs/stakeholder.pdf*
Understand and address barriers to participation
Common Barriers to Participation

- Time and location
- Language
- Family demands
- Unclear of value/purpose
Address Common Barriers

- Have clear purpose for engagement
- Conduct meetings in native languages
- Provide interpretation
- Provide transportation, meals, childcare
Support and build community capacity
Building Community Capacity

Why?

• Illustrates value
• Demonstrates investment
• Promotes sustainability
Building Community Capacity

How?

• Include community members in coalitions; invite/bring to table
• Resources for trainings, education
  • Equity, diversity and inclusion
  • Leadership development
  • Coaching on public testimony
• Ensure trainers/facilitators with equity perspective
Value community and technical expertise
Value community and technical expertise

- Involve at all levels of project development and implementation

- Allow community members to:
  - Define agenda
  - Organize and lead convenings/meetings
  - Invite unrepresented parties to the table

- Tap community and technical intelligence to develop common language
Time NOT on your side?
Time NOT on your side?

• Examine your coalition
  
  • Does it include organizations representing low income and communities of color?
  
  • Is there racial and ethnic diversity?
  
  • Who is missing from the table?
  
  • Which partners have the most meaningful community relationships?
Determine level of engagement

Source: Collective Impact Forum, adapted from Tamarack Institute and IAP2

Lay solid ground work for future efforts

• Be transparent with community

• Continue to build organizational/coalition capacity for equity work

• Maintain involvement with community orgs and residents

• Involve community in generating ideas for future work
Assessing community engagement efforts

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: Community Engagement**

1. Where are we now?
   - What existing relationships do we have with populations experiencing health inequities?
   - What is our current process/plan for engaging community members, particularly those experiencing health inequities?
   - Are we using language that facilitates or creates barriers to engaging the intended communities?

2. What approaches can we use to effectively engage community members?
   - What type of engagement techniques do we typically use? Have they had the effect we intended?
   - Are we using techniques that build community capacity and leadership? If not, what techniques could be pursued?

3. What barriers to community engagement should we consider?
   - What is our organization's history with the community?
   - What organizational barriers exist for meaningful community engagement activities? How can we overcome these barriers?
   - How will we identify barriers to community participation? How can we overcome these barriers?

4. How can we engage and balance both community and technical expertise in our efforts?
   - How do we show that we value and recognize the expertise of community members?
   - Do any strained relationships exist in the community? Why do they exist?
   - How can our engagement process best leverage both community and technical expertise?

5. What are our next steps?
   - What can we do differently to improve or enhance our community engagement?
   - What is our plan of action to implement those changes?

Source: CDC. *A Practitioner’s Guide for Advancing Health Equity: Community Strategies for Preventing Chronic Disease* (Page 13)
Thank you!

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Please complete a brief evaluation
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8H5Z2H3