

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

A general definition of community engagement:

a dynamic process of working collaboratively with and through groups of affiliated people to achieve or elicit a range of social outcomes

- Expect your efforts to evolve and change.
- Community engagement is centered around relationships.

FOR REFLECTION:

- What is the purpose of your project/organization?
- What is your definition of “community”?
- What might be lost without community engagement?
- What is the goal of the engagement efforts?
- Which community is most impacted/closest to the topic you are concerned about?

Mapping the Context

Awareness of the context in which your community engagement takes place is important. This will impact your decision-making throughout your planning processes.

Political and Cultural Factors for Reflection and Discussion

FOR REFLECTION:

- Who are the various stakeholders that relate to your topic? (including yourself)
- What are the insights and blind spots of each stakeholder?
- What are the dynamics between stakeholders?
- Who is the target stakeholder (individual or institution) that has the most power to influence or enact the desired changes relating to your topic?
- What are the traditions, organizational rituals, stories, symbols, and heroes that can be incorporated into engagement strategies?

FOR ACTION:

- Draw a context map diagram with the target stakeholder at the center and then, the associations (people or institutions) that have relationships with your target that can potentially influence them. Include lines that indicate direct and indirect relationships.
- Identify the people with the most relational lines drawn to them and those who have a lot of influence regarding your topic.
- Create next action steps by determining the best way to access the individuals through the relationships determined. This might include convening specific people who will increase the reach and impact of your engagement efforts.

Broader Considerations for Reflection and Discussion

- What are the economic conditions that might impact the work?
- What political agenda does your organization have and how might it impact what engagement strategies you choose?
- Are the issues and goals of your project widely embraced by the community or does a vocal group exist that opposes you?
- Does your engagement work target a limited few or does it promote the common good?