**Considerations for Ensuring Representation**

*The content below is adapted from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Community Engagement Guidelines for Community Health Planning 2017.*

Community engagement processes are ongoing relationships between stakeholders, community-based organizations, consumers, residents, local public health, and providers. In order to ensure equitable results, we need to involve communities impacted by a topic, throughout all phases of a project, and while maintaining clear and transparent communication.

## Elements of Community Engagement

There are many considerations and elements to community engagement, including:

* Power sharing
* Transparency
* Accommodations
* Facilitation

Each of these is described below.

## Power Sharing

Authentic community engagement means that power is being shared amongst constituencies and is central to improving community health. Many different types of power are present in any community engagement processes.[[1]](#footnote-1) Facilitators are charged to recognize the different types of power that exist in the community and through the community engagement process mitigate the power dynamics to receive input from as many perspectives as possible.[[2]](#footnote-2)

## Transparency

Transparency is essential for effective community engagement processes. Transparency ensures that the engagement process provides clearly defined, realistic objectives and articulates how engagement will impact the decision-making process. Feedback is provided to participants of the engagement process about outcomes of the process in order to maintain community engagement as an ongoing relationship between and with community participants.

Participants give knowledge and time to community engagement processes. It is necessary to recognize this and keep community members updated on the process’s next steps, how input is being used, and future input opportunities. The need for timely feedback is particularly stressed when members of the community hold strong, different opinions.

Records that are kept of the process (e.g., meeting minutes) must be kept in a manner that can be easily accessible. These necessarily explain the history of how decisions were made and the processes that occurred leading to the outcomes as community members become more or less engaged in the process at different stages. Below is a list of the questions that need to be asked to ensure transparency is being attained:

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| --- |
| Key questions to guide the development of informing and promoting materials address the basic who, what, when, where, and why. Examples of these questions include[[3]](#footnote-3):* + **Who** is the public health issue or matter affecting?
	+ **Who** should be involved?
	+ **What** is the public health decision, issue?
	+ **What** does the public need to do?
	+ **What** potential impacts will this issue/project have on the public?
	+ **Where** will meetings be held?
	+ **Where** will information be available?
	+ **When** is an activity taking place?
	+ **When** is a meeting being held?
	+ **Why** is the organization, municipality, or state proposing this action?[[4]](#footnote-4)
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#### Communication

Just as the above lists highlight outreach materials and use of interpreters and signers, communication can be seen as an overarching category of accommodations. For the purposes of this document, communication is divided into three components: spoken language, written communication, and cultural competence.[[5]](#footnote-5)

##### **Spoken language.** Before facilitating a meeting or interactions, it is necessary to analyze what a potential interpreter(s) role should be. Effort should be made to accommodate languages reflective of the diversity of the service area/geography.

##### **Written communication.** When designing materials to promote an engaged community, it is best to create easily understood materials. The *Massachusetts Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Guide* provides information to understand written communication and its accessibility.[[6]](#footnote-6)

##### **Cultural competence.** In addition to spoken language and written communication, cultural competence is another critical consideration. This means understanding the importance of how unconscious bias, equity, and social justice are being incorporated into the engagement process. The *Massachusetts Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Guide* provides a framework to think about cultural competency.[[7]](#footnote-7)

## Accommodations

To ensure sufficient representation from all groups in a community, essential accommodations must be made. Below is a list of the barriers and design issues to be considered when engaging community members.[[8]](#footnote-8) While the list is not exhaustive, it is helpful to begin thinking about how community engagement processes can be adapted to ensure participation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Potential Barriers to Consider | Design Issues to Consider |
| * The ability of different stakeholders to participate
* Engaging hard to reach groups’
* Levels of community infrastructure
* Contested or divided communities
* Rural isolation
* Gaps in information
* Literacy and numeracy levels and dominance of oral culture
 | * Techniques and engagement methods to be used
* Need for independent facilitation
* Location and accessibility of the venue
* The number and type of engagement events
* Transport requirements
* Childcare needs
* Format and content of communication and publicity materials
* Use of interpreters and signers
* Need for outreach activities
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#### Location

The location of meetings needs to be considered during the design of a community engagement process. The location should be physically accessible and perceived as a safe space for community members where they can feel comfortable voicing their opinions. Additionally, meeting outreach, indicating where and when a meeting will take place, should be accessible to all members of the defined community. Please see the communications section above for more information about messaging content.

##### **Physical Accessibility.** Transportation to and from a selected location(s) should be considered in the planning process. Locations should be easily accessible via public transportation, or in rural settings, provide sufficient and affordable parking options. Additionally, ADA-compliant, but preferably universally designed facilities should be used. More information about meeting accessibility is outlined in the Center for Disease Control’s “Making Meetings Accessible” Guide. [[9]](#footnote-9)

##### **Safety.** The location should be a safe space for all participants. Safety is connected to both perceived and physical safety. Perceived safety is both tied to safety from crime, but also providing a safe space where community members feel their voice will be heard.

#### Time

Depending on the purpose of the meeting, the timing of the meeting can prohibit involvement from necessary or representative community members. It is critical that planners examine the intended participants and schedule accordingly.

#### Childcare

For many community members, providing childcare is an important factor in making the meeting significantly more accessible. Specifically, a childcare accommodation can allow for otherwise inactive community members who are invested in the future of the community to attend the events.

#### Food and Stipends

As a best practice, providing meals and offering stipends to participants is an effective and meaningful way to limit barriers and encourage broad and valued community engagement. Offering a stipend to participants demonstrates the value that the engagers place on bringing participants into the process. Both practices are viewed as strongly recommended practices of a meaningful community engagement process.

## Facilitation

Due to partnership dynamics, effective community engagement processes include facilitation. Community health planning practitioners use a variety of strategies to determine whether a facilitator is effective. This includes:

* Reviewing the facilitators resume for experience (both frequency and type)
* Sitting in on a meeting that they facilitate; and,
* Evaluating the meetings they facilitate. This allows engagers to better decide what tools would be most helpful to evaluate the facilitator’s role in the meeting.[[10]](#footnote-10)

An additional meeting facilitation tool is the Facilitator Toolkit developed by the Office of Quality Improvement at the University of Wisconsin. It provides some guidance on developing facilitation evaluation tools and other strategies to ensure quality facilitation.[[11]](#footnote-11)

#### Facilitative Leadership

Facilitative leadership training could be useful to train leaders within your community that are receptive, flexible, collaborative, and strategic. The facilitative leader creates opportunities for people to voice their opinion while continuing to move the meetings forward. Facilitative leadership trains individuals in the tools and strategies to inclusively move initiatives forward.[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. This brief describes various forms of power present in community:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1045565.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Please see the [Facilitation section](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CCOliver%5CDownloads%5Cguidelines-community-engagement%20%281%29.docx#_Facilitation) of this document for reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Social Planning and Research Council of BC. (2013, July). *Community Engagement Toolkit.* Retrieved 11 4, 2016, from sparcbc: http://www.sparc.bc.ca/component/rubberdoc/doc/534/community-engagement-toolkit.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. More information on this list and other aspects of transparency can be found on the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia website in the Community Engagement Toolkit found here: <http://www.sparc.bc.ca/component/rubberdoc/doc/534/community-engagement-toolkit.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. More explanation of language services that should be provided are found in the Massachusetts Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) guide here:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/health-equity/chapter-6-ensure-language-access.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. More explanation of language services that should be provided are found in the Massachusetts Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) guide here:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/health-equity/chapter-6-ensure-language-access.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Additionally, further assistance on cultural competence can be found in a separate chapter of that same document here:

 <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/health-equity/chapter-1-foster-cultural-competence.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Community Places. (2014). *Community Planning Toolkit.* BIG Lottery Fund. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/transcripts/Making-Meetings-Accessible.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. One resource for evaluating facilitation and meetings can be found here:

<https://quality.wisc.edu/effective-meetings-tools-and-templates.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%20Tool%20Kit.pdf](http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%2520Tool%2520Kit.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <http://interactioninstitute.org/training/facilitative-leadership-for-social-change/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)