Implementation Tips *for* USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

Definitions

Community—A group of people united by location or by common beliefs, values or characteristics. Community also includes social interactions that promote:

- bonding around shared interests or characteristics
- a sense of belonging, purpose and common good
- a high degree of cooperation and participation in working for common goals
- an interpersonal climate of mutual respect

Culture—A set of shared values, beliefs and practices that characterize a group. Culture is learned through socialization and endures across generations. Shared culture, including gender roles, can be part of what unites a community.

Stakeholder—An individual, community or institutional entity that will be affected by, or who can affect, your project.

Beneficiary—An individual or institutional entity that is directly supported, improved or helped by your project.

References

[The Community Tool Box](#)

[Nonprofits Integrating Community Engagement (NICE) Guide](#) Offers information, tools, case studies and other resources to help nonprofit groups develop core competencies on constituent and community engagement.
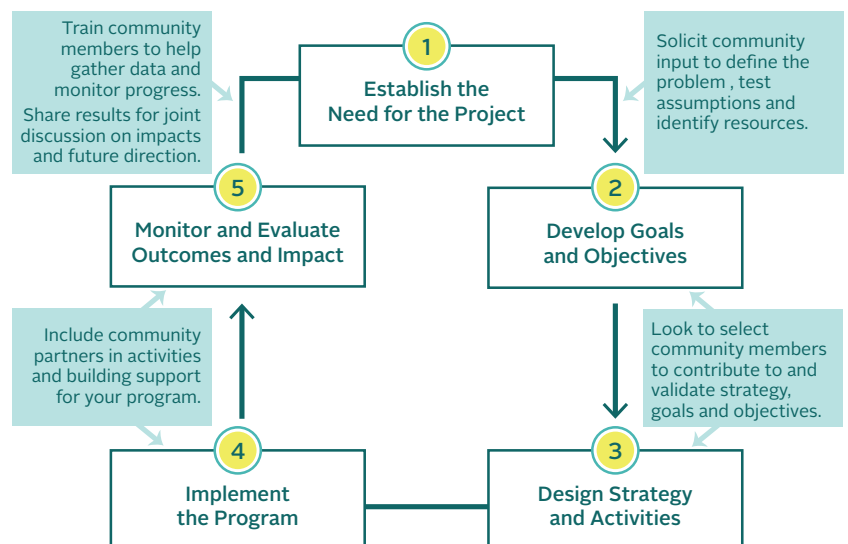
Engaging and Connecting with Your Community

Q. What is community engagement? How does it work?

A. Community engagement is a process of building and maintaining relationships with beneficiaries and other stakeholders who will be involved with your organization in a variety of ways around a shared goal to the benefit of both the organization and community members. It means creating processes and structures that consistently involve community members in decisions about program direction, service quality, client satisfaction and results. Community engagement takes time and energy. An investment in such a two-way process, however, often pays off in enhanced accountability, more sustainable outcomes and greater confidence in a community's ability to solve problems.

Community Engagement and the Project Life Cycle

The project life cycle follows a basic, logical sequence of steps that helps an organization move from identifying a problem, to developing solutions, to implementing activities, to evaluating results. Different organizations will use different planning methods to suit their needs, but involving the community at every stage of the project can contribute to lasting results and real social change.

Train community members to help gather data and monitor progress. Share results for joint discussion on impacts and future direction.

1 Establish the Need for the Project

Solicit community input to define the problem , test assumptions and identify resources.

5 Monitor and Evaluate Outcomes and Impact

2 Develop Goals and Objectives

Include community partners in activities and building support for your program.

Look to select community members to contribute to and validate strategy, goals and objectives.

4 Implement the Program

3 Design Strategy and Activities

Engaging your community will help your organization achieve long-lasting results and real change

Outreach vs. Community Engagement

Many people use the terms "outreach" and "engagement" interchangeably, but they are not the same. Here are some important distinctions.

Outreach
- Is primarily one-way, like a radio broadcast
- Focuses on talking to people, rather than listening
- Means approaching an audience or community with information
- Focuses on educating people
- Should be an important part of both a communication and community engagement strategy

Engagement
- Requires building ongoing, two-way relationships based on trust
- Involves listening to people
- Means working collaboratively to address community concerns
- Is integrated with an organization's culture, strategy and practices
- Means working with the community to identify solutions together
- Focuses on a conversation—an ongoing dialogue to develop understanding

In both cases, using local experts and consultants can help to ensure that you are reaching out to and engaging the community appropriately and effectively.

Source: The National Center for Media Engagement

Establish the Need for the Project

To help determine why an intervention is necessary, test your assumptions and check that your information is current and accurate by soliciting input from people who are most affected by the problem as well as those who can influence outcomes. Identifying needs and resources before starting a program means that you know from the beginning what you are dealing with and are less likely to be surprised later by something you didn't expect.

Depending on the issue, you may want to consult formal and informal leaders, men and women, young people, old people, technical experts, teachers and businesses. The more diversity among the people you engage, the more different opinions will likely be expressed and discussed; that means better decisions may get made.

Develop Goals and Objectives

Analyze the input you gathered to ensure that the project's goals and objectives match the wants and expectations of the community. It may be important to address the community's priorities first to establish trust and show respect, even if you do not believe that those priorities are in fact the most important. Building relationships and credibility may be more important at the beginning of a long association than immediately tackling what seems to be the most pressing need. Among other things, community members' priorities may be the right ones: they may see underlying factors that you do not yet understand.

Engage the Community in Program Implementation

Promote sustained involvement over the life of the program. Ensure that the community has a role to play in both implementing and monitoring the program. Creating regular opportunities for the community to keep a program on track may increase the chances that program benefits can be sustained. For example, program staff may meet regularly with an advisory committee to share and discuss project results.

Identify community resources that can be used to inform the project, share information and implement activities. These resources include people, institutions and other organizations active in the area. Establish ways for community members and program teams to learn, discuss and make decisions together.

Monitor and Evaluate Outcomes and Impact

Review progress together and build opportunities to gather and share results with the community at regularly scheduled intervals. Share results regularly and troubleshoot relevant problems together. Enroll and train community members to help with site visits, client satisfaction surveys, focus groups and other monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. Such participatory M&E, which both comes from and goes directly back to the people who are most deeply affected by the intervention, yields useful data and gives everyone a sense of ownership in the results.