



Identifying community stakeholders

As we plan outreach and engagement efforts, we must intentionally center the community members we hope to reach. To successfully implement programming, we must create authentic, sustainable relationships with community members. It is important to remember that “community members” have a wide background of lived experiences, including ethnic diversity, gender diversity, age diversity, physical ability, and neurodiversity. Community stakeholder mapping is a good first step in determining the people, populations, and communities we should prioritize.



Cultivating public participation

Once community members are identified, we must consider how to engage with them.

The International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation outlines *the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process.*¹ As we move from left to right on the spectrum, we build community trust, confidence, and finally decision-making power. At each stage of the spectrum, there is a public participation goal and a promise that we make to the Public. The goal and the promise should be made publicly and at each stage, inviting a deeper level of community engagement.

¹ [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation © IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112 v1](#)

IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	Provide the public with information.	Obtain public feedback.	Work directly with the public.	Partner with the community in all aspects of the work.	Give power to the community to make final decisions
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed...	...AND we listen to you, acknowledge you, and name how your feedback influenced us	We will work with you.	We will look to you to lead and guide.	We will implement what the community decides.



Source: IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

Questions to build authentic and sustainable community relationships

Creating authentic and sustainable relationships with community members is foundational to outreach and engagement. It is critical to acknowledge that while the tactics may differ from community to community or person to person, they should never come at the expense of building authentic and sustainable relationships.

Building relationships leads to an increase in social capital or the value of positive connections between people. This then leads to an increased capacity to affect change in the community. Because tactics are uniquely dependent upon the community, it may be helpful to create a diagnostic process to determine them. This diagnostic process can take many forms but is most effective when the questions are used internally. Below are examples of questions we can ask ourselves, our team, and our organization as we determine what outreach and engagement tactics will be most effective:

- Why is our program important for the community?
- Who is most impacted by this program?
- How will this program serve the community?
- How does this program serve and empower community members?
- How will we center the experience and perspective of underserved community members?
- What role does the community you serve have in implementing the program?

Internal work before engaging with disadvantaged communities²

We should ask ourselves additional questions when working with Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) who are historically underserved by the community or your organization. It is important to approach this process with humility and an authentic desire to build relationships. This approach will help us construct our questions, engage deeply with disadvantaged community members, and allow emergent strategies to take root. Some examples of internal questions include:

- How does this engagement strategy encourage people to share openly and authentically? What will people have to sacrifice to participate?
- Will someone who does not speak the primary language of the organization be able to participate?
- Will someone with a nonconforming gender identity feel safe participating?
- Will the strategy empower youth to participate? Alternatively, will someone over the age of 65 feel empowered to participate?

Final reflections

Finally, we must deeply understand our individual, programmatic, and organizational “why.” Not only does this ground us in our work, but it also helps acknowledge that our “why” may not meet the immediate needs of community members. This does not mean we should avoid engaging with people whose “whys” are different than our own. Rather it is a helpful reminder to meet each person, social identity group, and community where they are at.

² “Disadvantaged Communities” is a term used by federal government. Extension acknowledges that this is deficit-based language that should be reframed from an asset-based perspective.

Additionally, disadvantaged community members are not a monolith. No one engagement strategy will meet everyone’s needs, preferences, and desires, as is the case for “Non-disadvantaged” community members.