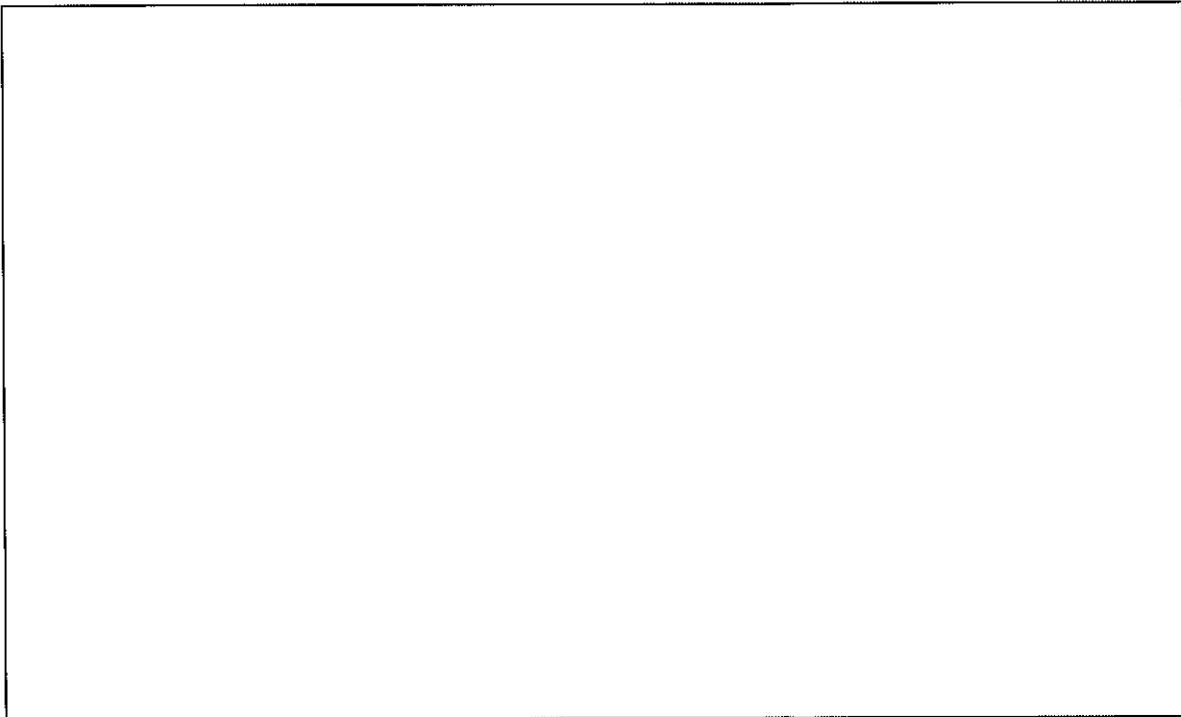


## **Community Engagement Toolkit**

### **T1: Be Result-driven & Purposeful**

For the purposes of this toolkit, “community” refers to intended beneficiaries and their families, friends, neighbors, and the leaders of small community-based or faith-based groups who work most closely with them in the place they live.

Please answer this before you begin: Why is community engagement important to your initiative? How will it contribute to your results?



It is important to be clear, direct, and transparent about your purpose for engaging community. If you see engagement as something nice to do or just want to check a “community engagement” box and get it done, your engagement will fail and likely lead to greater distrust and conflict. If you sincerely see engagement as necessary to achieving better results, then proceed.

To do this, we must recognize that our best efforts, even when guided by data and evidence, will not succeed without community members’ experience, knowledge, relationships, skills, and participation.

***“Doing to us, not with us, is a recipe for failure.” – Dr. Howard Fuller, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University***

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**Complete the following chart before going forward:** What are the goals/outcomes of your initiative, how do you think engagement might advance those results, and what roles do you see community members playing to advance those results?

Goals/Outcomes	Why Engagement?	Roles for Community

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*Add more boxes as needed*

## Community Engagement Toolkit

### **T2: Community Engagement Spectrum<sup>1</sup>**

Increasing Impact on Decision-Making and Implementation				
INFORMING	CONSULTING	INVOLVING	COLLABORATING	EMPOWERING
Providing balanced and objective information about new programs or services, and about the reasons for choosing them.	Inviting feedback on alternatives, analyses, and decisions related to new programs or services.	Working with community members to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are considered at every stage of planning and decision-making. We also engage their assets as partners to implement solutions.	Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services. Community members actively produce outcomes.	Giving community members sole decision-making authority over new programs or services, and lead work to implement solutions. Professionals only serve in consultative and supportive roles.
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to your input and feedback, and let you know your ideas and concerns have influenced decisions.	We will ensure your input and feedback is directly reflected in alternatives, and let you know how your involvement influenced decisions. We will engage you as partners to implement solutions.	We will co-create and co-produce solutions with you. You will be true partners in making and implementing decisions for the community, your advice and recommendations will be incorporated as much as possible.	We will support your decisions and work to implement solutions.
Fact sheets, newsletters, websites, open houses	Surveys, focus groups, community meetings and forums	Community organizing, leadership development, workshops	Advisory boards, seats on governing boards, engaging and funding as partners	Support full governance, leadership, and partnership

Choose your community engagement strategy, clarify the promise to community members, and then fulfill those promises. Engagement is obviously most robust on the right side of the diagram. This can also be read as a spectrum between buy-in and ownership. On the left side, we are often mobilizing people to support or provide limited input or feedback to our decisions. On the right side, we are organizing people to identify their interests and assets – they become deciders, outcome producers, advocates, leaders. It is about shifting power to community.

It is not always necessary, appropriate, or within your capacity to practice collaborative or empowering approaches, but you should push your assumptions and comfort to move as far right as appropriate. Moving to the right means giving up power, because this work is not about your power, but about community results.

<sup>1</sup> This is adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

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It is essential that wherever you are on the spectrum, you must be clear and transparent about your position and fulfill the promises of being there. The greatest tensions and conflicts come when leaders promise a more involved, collaborative, or empowering level of engagement but deliver an informing or consulting level. If you aspire to more engagement, communicate that and take clear steps that demonstrate your commitment is real. It is also important to be transparent about how much power you are willing to give away or not.

Where are your community engagement efforts now on the spectrum? Where do you aspire to be?

For where you aspire to be, what steps will you need to take to pursue that level of engagement? What power or control do you have to give up?

What expectations will you need to communicate and fulfill for community members?

## **Community Engagement Toolkit**

### **T3: Asset-Based Community Development**

The core idea of **Asset-Based Community Development**<sup>1</sup> is that rather than begin by defining people and communities by their deficits and trying to fix them, you find their assets (experience, knowledge, skills, talents, passions, and relationships) and engage them. It is a place-based strategy that recognizes that people don't always need programs and institutions to serve them, and often can achieve more working together with neighbors and families to solve problems and strengthen their communities. Solving community problems takes people not just programs.

The five key questions of ABCD are:

- (1) What can residents best do by themselves?
- (2) What do they need some help from organizations to do, and
- (3) What do organizations do best?
- (4) What can we stop doing because people can do it by themselves?
- (5) What can we offer to community to support their actions?

Too often organizations only ask the third question and do work *for* or *to* communities without doing work *with* communities. Building relationships (i.e., social capital), leadership, and engagement strengthens communities. It creates a healthier, more vibrant context for other strategies to succeed, and contributes to that success.

**Recognize that community residents and intended beneficiaries have assets - experience, knowledge, skills, talents, passions, and relationships - that are often overlooked and untapped contributors to impact results.**

The distinction here is seeing community members not as just sources of input or feedback but as part of the outcome-production system in communities. The woman who checks in on all the young mothers in the neighborhood is contributing to health outcomes. The young adult who watches out for younger kids in the neighborhood is contributing to youth development outcomes.

Typically, we only think of nonprofits and government services when we think of who is needed to serve a community and solve a problem. We need to see those closest to people, neighborhoods, and issues being served as assets who are producers - not just consumers - of service. **Ignoring and neglecting those assets is a form of bias.**

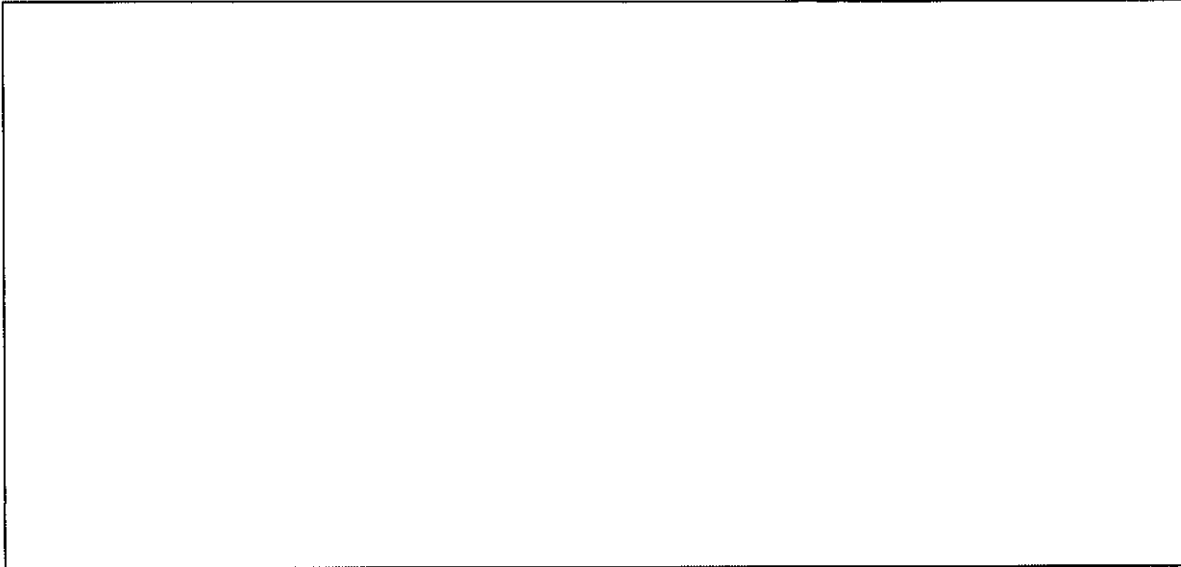
**The goal of any effort should not be strong programs but strong communities - the only change that is truly sustainable.**

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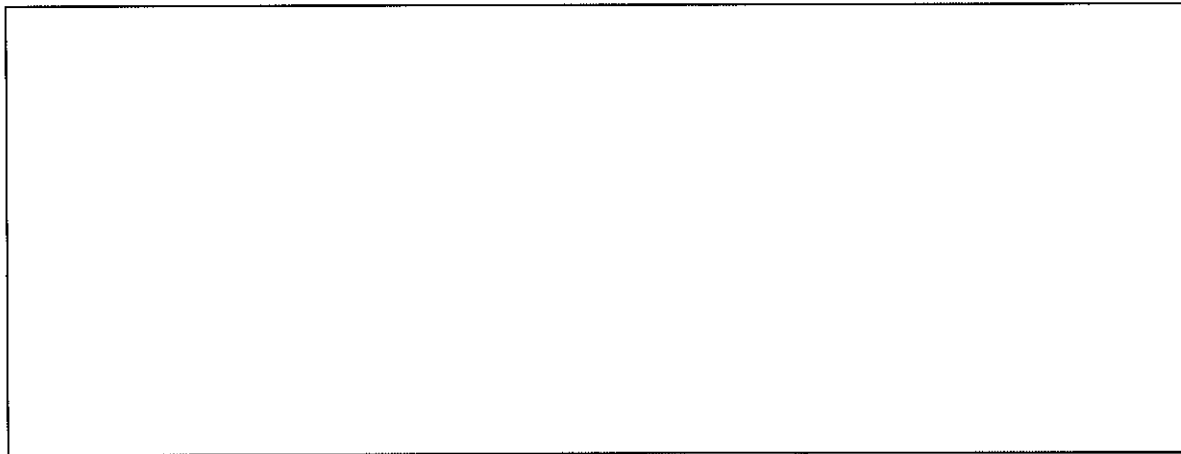
<sup>1</sup> The Asset Based Community Development Institute is the best resource on this work [www.abcdinstitute.org](http://www.abcdinstitute.org). Thank you to Dan Duncan of Clear Impact & ABCD Institute for his help on this. Family Independence Initiative is a great example of resident-directed impact [www.fiinet.org](http://www.fiinet.org)

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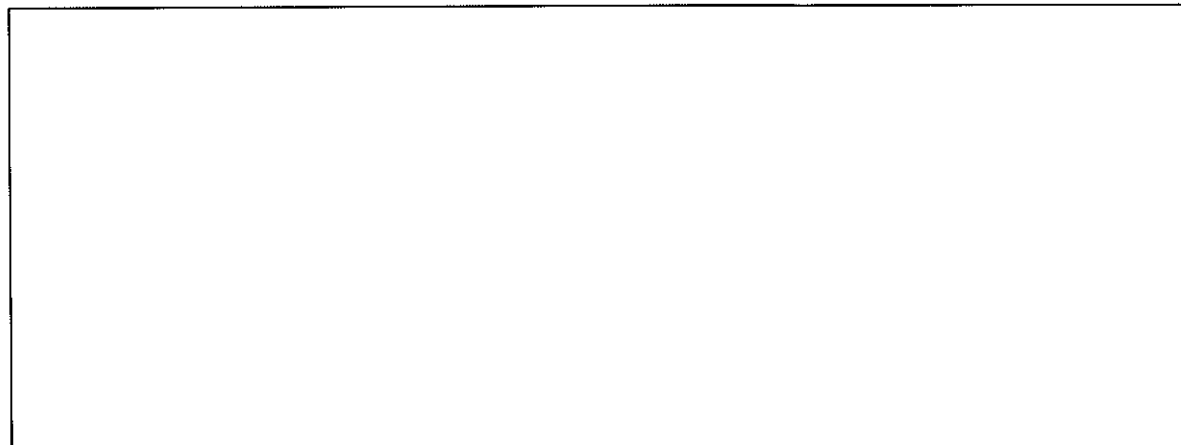
**What is the story you tell about your work in the community (think about reports, proposals, presentations)? What roles do community members play in your story?**



**How do community members already contribute to your impact/result outside of any formal initiative/project? How do community members help each other here?**



**How can you support more leadership, engagement, and connection of community members as partners in producing your impact/result?**



## Community Engagement Toolkit

### T4: Equity - Who is at our Tables?

#### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Defined<sup>1</sup>

- **Diversity:** Engaging people with different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and recognizing the differences as assets to learning and innovation.
- **Inclusion:** Authentic and empowered participation, a true sense of belonging.
- **Equity:** Recognizing that everyone does not start at the same place, so some people will need different resources or support to achieve the same outcome. The goal is to eliminate disparities and level the playing field.

#### Assess your tables

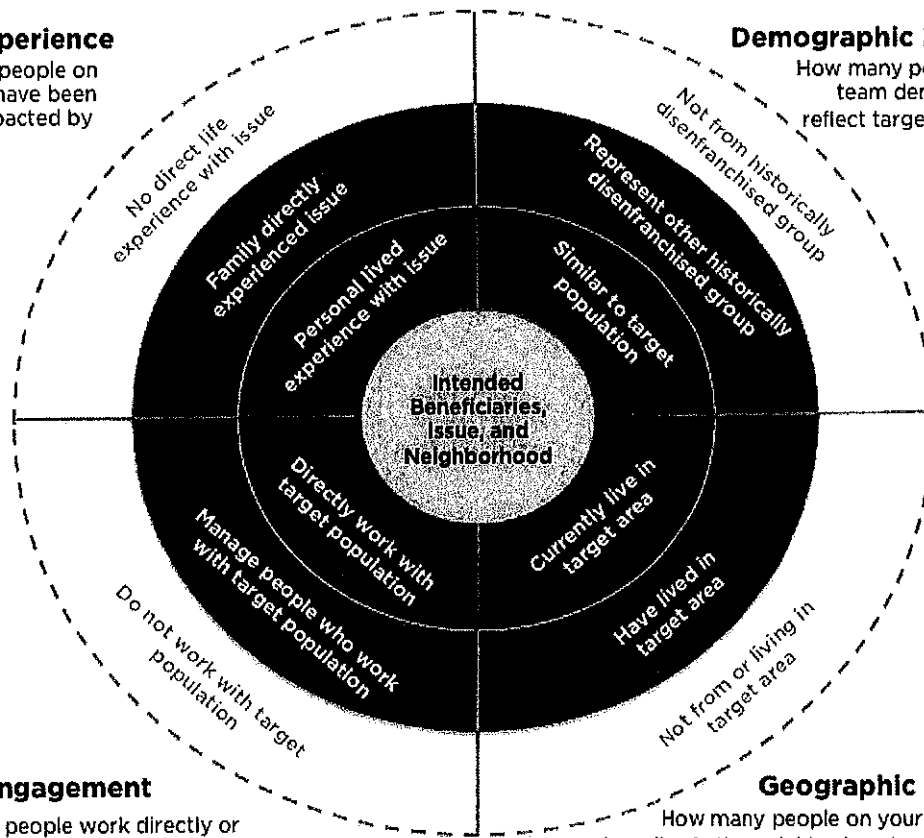
Understanding who is on your team or committee in these ways can help you identify what strengths and gaps you have in terms of experience and context expertise about the intended beneficiaries, issues, and neighborhoods you serve. If the majority of your team is in the outer circle, you need to address equity at your table and your need for community engagement is more acute.

#### Issue Experience

How many people on your team have been directly impacted by the issue?

#### Demographic Relevance

How many people on your team demographically reflect target population?



#### Direct Engagement

How many people work directly or indirectly with target population?

#### Geographic Relevance

How many people on your team grew up in or live in the neighborhood you are serving?

<sup>1</sup> *7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014 is a great resource for this work.

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Please map your core team, board, or steering committee based on where individuals are on the map.

Map your Core Team/Committee	Direct Relevance	Secondary Relevance	Limited Relevance
Demographic Background			
Geographic Relevance			
Direct Engagement			
Issue Experience			

Do you feel you have the right mix of actors involved to understand the population, issue, and neighborhoods you wish to help?

**What gaps are at your tables? What steps could you take to correct for that?**

[examples of steps include adding people to your committee, hiring people, forming an advisory group, seeking professional support, and partnering with other groups]