For grant applicants: Tips for reaching and including underserved communities

Including groups that you have not previously engaged with in your work is important for building relationships that lead to stronger communities as a whole. This can help you align your work with community priorities. You may encounter unique considerations such as language differences, cultural misunderstanding, lack of trust between people and organizations, and a mismatch of needs and services. It is important to approach this work with patience and humility. Acknowledging our own limits and being open to listening and learning from others is essential.

We acknowledge that this work is complex and involves much more than we have outlined here. This tip sheet is meant to serve as a starting place. You might consider the following ideas:

Reaching out to potential community partners:

- ❑ Reflect on which communities your work currently reaches and misses
- ❑ Start with identifying who in your existing networks could be a bridge to other groups you want to connect with.
- ❑ Attend local cultural events or community meetings as a participant to listen and learn.
- ❑ Do some online research to learn more about what organizations serve specific communities and reach out to those organizations to learn more about how your work could support their work. This might include faith-based organizations.
- ❑ Expand the reach of services you currently offer by providing language interpretation and translation for public meetings, events, and resources.
- ❑ Host a meet and greet with incentives to draw in participants such as food or gifts.

Working with community partners:

Coming together

- ❑ Start with identifying shared values and goals
- ❑ Acknowledge community strengths and contributions
- ❑ Prioritize community needs and concerns
- ❑ Consider hiring a third-party facilitator to get your partnership off to a good start

Getting organized

- ❑ Include interpretation, translation, and accommodations requests as part of your budget
- ❑ Offer a learning exchange to ensure everyone is starting with the same information
- ❑ Ensure that group composition is balanced among interested parties
- ❑ Co-develop and agree on a set of ground rules, group agreements, or partnership expectations
- ❑ Co-develop projects and processes, including scope of work, agendas, goals, and metrics

Making decisions

- ❑ Make decisions together by reaching a consensus, rather than using a majority-rule approach
- ❑ Be aware of which voices are prioritized
- ❑ Be aware of what ideas are welcomed, including politics, community norms and values

Working together

- ❑ Pay participants fairly for providing service, skills, time and expertise
- ❑ Make space for open and honest communication
- ❑ Be clear, consistent, comprehensive and transparent in your communications, including your limitations and constraints
- ❑ Offer multiple opportunities for engagement (for example: in-person at various locations, virtual focus group, anonymous online format such as a survey, multiple time slots for the same event)

- ❑ Be flexible and address barriers such as transportation, childcare, work schedule conflicts, internet access, lack of accessibility
- ❑ Be open to working in new ways through storytelling activities, art projects, over a shared meal, at a community center, etc.

Create meaningful impact

- ❑ Share knowledge and resources to grow community partners' capacity for leadership
- ❑ Communicate back to the community about the impact of the work
- ❑ Be thorough in follow-up including making sure payments have gone through, products are translated into other languages, and credit given reflects everyone's efforts

A note on word choice:

- Use community of focus or priority community *not* target community
- Specify which community(ies), example BIPOC or Refugee *not* minority community
- Interested parties, community members, or specify groups *not* stakeholder

Additional resources:

- https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/934dada0240465383fb5bee435b57395/Tips-Engaging-Diverse-Partners.pdf

- https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-01/Listening%20Session%20Project%20Guide%20%28Final%29.pdf

This tip sheet has been adapted from:
https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/COMMUNITYENGAGEMENTGUIDE_LY_FINAL%20%281%29.pdf

The OHSU UCEDD Community Engagement Grant program supports the capacity of community-based organizations to provide relevant programming for people with disabilities and their families. Learn more here: www.ohsu.edu/minigrant