

Community Engagement Guide for Advancing Health Equity



What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a long-term process in which community members are partners in identifying action steps that can be implemented to improve health. It goes beyond community outreach that consists of short-term activities designed to share information with or seek input from community members. Community engagement is an intentional practice that includes the diverse perspectives of the community, addresses power dynamics, fosters strong relationships, and leads to action. It requires organizations to work deliberately to build long-term trusting relationships and to be open and responsive to community input.

Community engagement should offer opportunities for communities to express their views and have a meaningful role in decision-making. It should also consider the diversity of the community and seek to create an inclusive and accessible process. Effective engagement removes barriers for communities that may have previously prevented residents from successfully working with local government. Engaging community members who are the most impacted by the issues is essential in creating and sustaining change. Alone, none of us can overcome the challenges facing our community, but together we can make progress by examining and improving the practices, policies, and systems that affect the health of our community.

Community Engagement & Health Equity

Strong, strategic, long-term, and trusting relationships with community partners are vital to advancing health equity and transforming public health practices. These relationships must recognize each other's strengths, be rooted in shared values and interests, share decision making, and allow for authentic participation by those facing inequities. Rather than simply seeking feedback or hosting one-way conversations, we must intentionally listen to and learn from communities, and partner with communities in ways that build their capacity and power to gain greater control over the factors that affect their lives.

Best practices for health departments working to advance health equity through community engagement include: remaining open to learning about community priorities, allowing time and space to get to know one another, identifying strategic opportunities for communities to contribute their expertise and knowledge, and sharing resources to develop skills and capacity to partner with the health department. Most importantly, health departments must demonstrate a willingness to be guided by communities' needs, interests, and voices, which will determine departments' policy and program priorities.

The Wood County Health Equity Plan is based on Human Impact Partners' Strategic Practices, which were developed to support local health departments in transforming their work to advance health equity. The strategic practices are categorized into four different domains; community engagement is a primary focus of the third domain – **Foster Community Partnerships**. This domain includes the following set of strategic practices to advance equity and share power with communities:

- Partner with communities experiencing inequities in ways that intentionally share power and decision making. Identify strategic opportunities and avenues for communities to

contribute their expertise and knowledge. Co-develop, adopt, and promote a shared agenda, narrative, and resources to advance health equity

- Design more inclusive decision-making processes to actively reduce the marginalization of specific racial and socioeconomic groups. Allocate time, funds, and capacity building to facilitate the meaningful participation of communities experiencing health inequities in department decision making
- Create a culture of respectful co-learning, evaluation, reflection, and transparency about department and community needs/priorities to build trust between department and community partners
- Allow time and space to connect. Routinely attend meetings and events organized by community and social justice organizations and show support by staying informed of their activities and priorities
- Train and prepare staff to respectfully and thoughtfully engage with communities experiencing health inequities
- Highlight and sustain community partnerships that have led to changes in department policies, processes, and practices
- Use data, advocacy, and other expertise to support community-led social justice efforts that would improve equity

Healthy People Wood County Community Engagement Goals

1. Create and sustain a culture that demonstrates commitment to equitable and inclusive community engagement by dedicating resources to support the work.
2. Listen authentically and create avenues for meaningful participation with residents and partners.
3. Assure a shared decision-making process with communities who are affected most by health inequities.
4. Strengthen community relationships by enhancing communication, collaboration, and coordination between public health leaders and other organizations serving priority populations.

HPWC Performance Measures

Goal 1.1 Partners and community members are actively engaged in the work

Objective 1.1.1 – 50% of resident follow-up action based on one-on-one outreach

Objective 1.1.2 – # external communications per month, as defined by the HPWC Communication Plan, will be completed to inform and engage Wood County residents

Goal 2.1 Advance health equity through equitable strategies

Objective 2.1.1 – 75% of strategies are equitable

Objective 2.1.2 – 75% of strategies have community input as defined by the HPWC Community Engagement Guide

Community Engagement Spectrum

Increasing Community Impact on the Decision



Level of Engagement	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Community Driven
Goal of Engagement	Community is provided with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding public health issues, programs, and policies	Community input is requested to inform public health priorities and decisions that are led by the organization	Community input is requested, obtained, and included to shape public health priorities and decisions	Community and organization commit to working together to create solutions via an established participatory, shared decision-making process	Community initiates and directs public health strategy and action with sufficient resources, technical assistance, and support from organization
Organization's Role	Keep the community informed	Request input from the community; input may or may not be used	Work to ensure community input is included in the decision and report back how the input influenced the decision	Work to ensure a participatory, shared decision-making process that includes maximum community input in the decision	Implement what the community decides. Support community-identified strategy and action, and provide sufficient resources and technical assistance
Community's Role	Receive information	Provide input	Provide input in a participatory process	Provide input in a participatory process and share decision-making power with organization	Initiate and direct strategy and action, and make final decision on public health issues

Level of Engagement	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Community Driven
Characteristics of Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-way communication • One interaction • Primarily short-term • Addresses immediate need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily one-way communication • One to multiple interactions • Short to medium-term • Shapes and informs county priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way communication • Multiple interactions • Medium to long-term • Advancement of solutions to complex issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way communication • Multiple interactions • Medium to long-term • Advancement of solutions to complex issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way communication • Multiple interactions • Medium to long-term • Advancement of solutions to complex issues
Community Engagement Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Newsletter • Press release • Fact sheet • Policy brief • Poster • Brochure • Web site • Social media • Tabling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community conversation • Community survey • 1:1 conversation • Door knocking • Public testimony • Storytelling • Photovoice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition • Advisory Board or Committee • Steering Committee • Workgroup • Workshop • Public forum • Public testimony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition • Co-led community meetings • Advisory Board or Committee • Steering Committee • Board/Committee seats • Policy development & advocacy • Public testimony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition • Community-led planning efforts • Community-hosted forums • Attending community meetings • Serving as advisory members • Providing funding, data, and technical assistance • Policy development & advocacy
Outcomes of Engagement Strategy	Establishes communication and outreach channels	Develops connections	Visible partnerships are established	Partnership building, trust building	Strong bidirectional trust built; Broader health outcomes affecting broader community addressed

Engagement Strategies

- **1:1 Conversation** – A 1:1 is a personal conversation between an individual community member and a coalition leader or community engagement organizer. The goal is to share concerns, level of interest and commitment for an issue, as well as the resources each person has to offer. These conversations help to build positive relationships within the community which can create a strong base of support, help build power, increase understanding of issues, engage people using their strengths and their interests, and build trust which helps to sustain long-term change.
- **Advisory Board or Committee** – An Advisory Board or Committee is just that, a group that advises the organization. It does things such as advise an organization or project about various items related to community health improvement, but it doesn't set policy or oversee the Director, operation, or finances. A Board can strengthen your organization in many ways: perform some of the tasks of the organization, support your work in the community, convince others that you know what you're doing, contribute particular skills and talents, advise the organization on legal or other matters, and help with fundraising. A good Board helps lend credibility and legitimacy to the organization in the eyes of the community.
- **Board/Committee seats** – Membership on a Board or Committee gives people the opportunity to volunteer for a cause they believe in and to use their skills or prominence in satisfying ways. Additionally, members are part of the community, so they help connect the organization and its work to the community. You have something to offer by asking people to serve on your Board or Committee, as well as something to gain.
- **Coalition** – Often, community problems or issues are too large and complex for any one agency or organization to tackle. In these circumstances, putting together a coalition of groups and individuals can be an effective strategy for changing the programs, policies, systems, and environments that are needed to solve the problem or achieve the goal. In simplest terms, a coalition is a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal. The individuals and organizations involved might be drawn from a narrow area of interest, or might include representatives of nearly every segment of the community, depending upon the breadth of the issue. Coalitions may be loose associations in which members work for a short time to achieve a specific goal, or they can be more permanent working on longer-term goals. Either way, they exist to create and/or support efforts to reach a particular set of goals.
- **Community Conversation** – A community conversation is a tool that can be used to capture community input. It focuses on engaging members of a community to discuss what helps and hinders community growth and community health improvement. A community conversation is a guided discussion with a small group of individuals from similar backgrounds. They generate knowledge that can be used to inform decision-making and help to mobilize ideas, improve skills, and build on passion of the community. Click [here](#) for tips for a successful community conversation.

- **Community Survey** – A community survey is critical for collecting community-wide data. It allows organizations to collect quantitative data, which allows generalizations and an overview of a community's strengths and weaknesses. The survey should be conducted using platforms that are suited for a variety of audiences. The use of multiple platforms helps to ensure active community engagement from diverse sectors of the community. Platforms include: online surveys, paper-based surveys, and surveys available in multiple languages.
- **Door Knocking** – Door knocking means going door-to-door and asking people for information or feedback related to community health improvement. You can ask broad or specific questions, but it is best to have a set list of questions you want to ask people. Prep work to determine an introduction/purpose statement, questions, location of door knocking, leave behinds, etc. is required.
- **Fact sheet** – A fact sheet is a single sheet of paper listing important facts about the issue. Fact sheets can be laid out just about any way you'd like as long as they list the main facts you want to include. You can do one fact sheet with basic information, or you can do a whole series of them. Fact sheets are easy to make and easy to understand, can be made up very quickly, and are cheap to create and distribute. More on fact sheets [here](#).
- **Photovoice** – Photovoice is a process in which people – usually those with limited power due to poverty, language barriers, race, class, ethnicity, gender, culture, or other circumstances – use video and/or photo images to capture aspects of their environment and experiences and share them with others. The pictures are usually used with captions composed by the photographers, to bring to light the realities of the photographers' lives to the public and policymakers and to spur change. Photovoice can help changemakers understand the lived experiences of disadvantaged communities and give a voice to underprivileged individuals. Click [here](#) to learn more about photovoice.
- **Policy brief** – A policy brief presents a concise summary of information that can help readers understand, and likely make decisions about, government policies related to public health. Policy briefs give objective summaries of relevant research, suggest possible policy options, and sometimes, go even further and argue for particular courses of action and/or recommendations. They can be written for a variety of audiences including, but not limited to, public health practitioners, advocates, policymakers, and the general public. For guidance on writing a policy brief, click [here](#).
- **Policy development & advocacy** – Policy change is one of the most effective and sustainable approaches in community health improvement, which makes it a key community engagement strategy. Click [here](#) for a toolkit on influencing policy development and [here](#) for information on how to conduct research to influence policy creation or policy change.
- **Press release** – A press release is a brief written summary or update, alerting the local media about upcoming events or important news. Press releases are created either to

preview an upcoming event or to inform the public about something that has already occurred; written in a clear, concise manner that easily and quickly conveys its message to the reader; written with the most current and pertinent information in the first two paragraphs; and are subject to editing for content and space or time requirements, depending on the media. Click [here](#) for more on why, when, and how to create a press release.

- **Public forum** – Public forums (also known as “Town Halls”) and listening sessions are a valuable resource in upholding open lines of communication with the public. Citizen participation in community projects can help identify and solve problems. During these open meetings, citizens discuss important issues such as health problems, and facilitators lead a discussion of various aspects of the issue like the community's strengths and potential problems. Public forums are open to everyone in the community and offer people from diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views about key issues of concern and what can be done about them. Click [here](#) to learn more about planning and conducting public forums.
- **Public testimony** – A public health professional who gives testimony at a public hearing describes to decision-makers how changes in a law or policy will impact the health of the community. Our lives are affected every day in some way by the laws and policies of our federal, state, and local governments and their agencies. Before laws and policies can be altered, public hearings are often held to give citizens a chance to voice their support for or their concern about proposed changes. Click [here](#) to learn how to prepare effective testimony.
- **Social Media** – Social media uses computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. This method will be used to promote engagement activities, such as tabling events and photovoice.
- **Steering committee** – A Steering Committee may be appointed or elected, but is often open to any member of the organization who is interested in helping it to run. It usually makes recommendations about a particular action or about the direction in which the organization should go, rather than setting policy. If the Steering Committee oversteps these bounds, the organization may dissolve it, or otherwise limit its authority. Coalitions, which may be organizations made up of several other organizations, often have Steering Committees.
- **Storytelling** – Storytelling can be a powerful, multi-dimensional tool for community-based public health program enhancement, strategic communication, and advocacy. Stories can give a voice to people's own experiences and connect knowledge to action. Storytelling allows us to better learn from the experiences of communities affected by public health problems. Stories are also used to make statistics and quantitative data more accessible and relatable.
- **Tabling** – Tabling is a simple technique to gather information from the community. It is exactly what it sounds like: Set up a table at an establishment and ask people to answer

a few brief questions as they come or go. This will be performed at partner sites and public spaces to gather information relating to personal and community health improvement, as well as to promote other community engagement activities.

- **Workgroup** – A workgroup is a group of people working on a specific issue or action. Typically, a workgroup is a subset of a larger group like a coalition. It is comprised of 2 or more individuals working on a specific issue or action within a larger goal.
- **Workshop** – A workshop is an in-depth face-to-face detailed discussion that can take a variety of forms. It enables people to engage in informed, meaningful discussions and provides people an opportunity to develop opinions and solutions. Often, people split into smaller groups so many conversations can happen. Workshops require skilled facilitation and often more than one facilitator is necessary for a successful workshop.

*Strategy information from Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute's Community Engagement Toolkit, Health Equity Alliance of Rock County's Community Engagement Toolkit, and the Community Tool Box.

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- Health Equity Alliance of Rock County
- Rock County Public Health
- Boston Public Health
- Community Tool Box
- Minnesota Department of Health
- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Appendix

General Community Engagement Resources

- Community Tool Box Home page - <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>
- Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute [Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute [Community Health Improvement Toolkit](#)
- Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute: Community Engagement & Partnerships resource list - <http://hwli.org/community-engagement-and-partnerships>
- Health Equity Alliance of Rock County's [Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- Human Impact Partners [Health Equity Guide](#)
- Boston Public Health [Community Engagement Plan](#)
- IAP2 public participation [spectrum](#)
- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps Who to Work With - [Partner Center](#)
- Wisconsin CHIPP Infrastructure Improvement Project - Listening to the Community's Input: [A Guide to Primary Data Collection](#)
- Comprehensive [list of methods](#) for community engagement/coproduction with categories including what's it good for, strengths, weaknesses, participation level, and more