

# A Guide to Using the Community Engagement Framework

To promote health equity, we need more meaningful community engagement. Meaningful community engagements means working with and listening to community members to address the issues that affect their well-being. To achieve this, we must learn about the communities we serve. We must also understand structural racism, or racial bias across institutions and society, which is the root cause of health inequities in the United States. Structural racism creates persistent challenges for communities and residents, including:

- ▶ The unequal distribution of resources
- ▶ The exclusion of communities from the decision-making process
- ▶ Policies, practices and systems within institutions that create and sustain racism, also known as institutional racism (for example, redlining)
- ▶ Unfairly providing advantages and disadvantages to people based on their different identities (for example, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion)

Meaningful community engagement also means tapping into the expertise and organizing capacity of communities, because communities know their own strengths and barriers best. As an agency, meaningful community engagement advances health equity to ensure that all New Yorkers can achieve their full health potential regardless of their social position (for example, class, immigration status) or social identity (for example, race, ethnicity, gender identity). As public health practitioners, we cannot create solutions on our own. Building and maintaining trusted relationships with communities ensures that community-based programs will be successful for many years to come.

This handout will help you understand commonly used terms in meaningful community engagement and provides general guidance on how to include meaningful community engagement in your project. For additional racial equity and social justice terms and definitions, see the “Glossary” in this kit.

## The Four Categories of Community Engagement

It is important that we have a common language and understanding of the four categories of community engagement. Meaningful community engagement happens within each of these categories. For additional information on these four categories, see the Assessment and Metrics Guides in this kit.

**1. Outreach:** Establish communication channels with communities, such as community-informed media campaigns, health fairs, presentations, emergency notifications and newsletters, to share information.

**For example:** *During the Ebola outbreak, the Health Department used data and worked with the community to inform communication messages. Health Department staff from West African backgrounds helped to connect the agency to faith leaders and partners serving the West African community.*

**2. Consult:** Seek information from stakeholders through listening sessions, community consultations, advisory groups and other activities. Incorporate their input into systems, policies, programs and interventions.

**For example:** *The LGBTQ Health Equity Coalition, formed by the Health Department’s Division of Disease Control, consults with distinct parts of the LGBTQ community to incorporate their expertise and experiences on specific LGBTQ-related issues.*

**3. Involve/Collaborate:** Form partnerships with stakeholders, such as coalitions and workgroups, to achieve a common goal.

**For example:** *As part of the Health Department's community engagement strategy for post-emergency canvassing after a coastal storm, the agency met regularly with LES Ready! The organization is made up of community representatives who play an active role in disaster planning for the Lower East Side (LES), where close to 20% of residents have a disability and 32% live in high poverty. During their meetings, the Health Department and LES Ready! shared planning details, agreed upon areas of collaboration and began to formally integrate their emergency plans.*

**4. Shared Leadership:** Share ownership of a problem and creating its solution through community-led decision-making, including community-based participatory research, grassroots initiatives and planning groups.

**For example:** *The Brooklyn Active Transportation Community Planning Initiative is a recipient of a Health Department grant on active transportation in Brownsville and East New York. As part of this grant, residents gave their input through surveys, school and community forums, neighborhood street assessments and activation events. Together, residents, City agencies and community-based organizations declared their support to expand bicycling infrastructure in Brownsville and East New York.*

### Think Critically About Your Project

1. Consider **which categories** of community engagement match your project. Activities in one project can fall within one or more categories.
2. Identify the community you are trying to reach, and the historical and social factors that influence health in that community. Determine project outcomes that address unjust differences in health, or health inequities.
3. Commit to applying the **characteristics and values** associated with each community engagement category you select for your project or activity. Challenge your team to consider how your project can better achieve racial and health equity. See the Assessment and Metrics guides in this kit for a list of characteristics and values.
4. Implement an **evaluation or tracking system** in Public Health Partners Connect to make you're applying a racial justice lens to your project.

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Use the Community Engagement Assessment and Metrics guides in this kit to help you reflect, plan and execute meaningful community engagement. Explore the Health Department's Community Engagement Framework on SharePoint for a more comprehensive description of the four categories of community engagement.

Other useful resources: Government Alliance for Race and Equity's Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity and the City of Seattle's Racial Equity Toolkit.