Community Engagement Definition, Principles, and Practices

Shared in this document are the principles and best practices for community engagement as recommended by the Dartmouth Community Engagement Coalition. Engaging with community members is uniquely challenging and the information provided here is intended to help avoid undesirable interactions in your work.

Dartmouth Definition of Community Engagement

Community engagement considers the diversity of communities, including culture and race, and aims to create an inclusive and accessible environment. Effective community engagement involves collaborative partnerships where community members actively participate in decision-making and problem-solving. It is characterized by inclusivity and diversity, ensuring representation from various segments of the community. Additionally, community engagement focuses on capacity building, empowering communities through education and resources, and sustainability, developing long-term solutions maintained by the community.

Community engagement builds sustainable relationships through trust

and collaboration, strengthening community well-being. The process

should be enduring, equitable, and culturally sensitive to all participants,

with a shared goal of addressing the concerns of the community.[1]

Nothing about us, without us.[2]

Benefits of Community Engagement [3]

Community engagement seeks to better engage the community to achieve shared goals. Approaches to community engagement are varied and can support multiple

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[1] https://health.ucdavis.edu/media-resources/crhd/documents/pdfs/pce-3rd-edition.pdf
[2] https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnqn9
[3] Shifting Academic Health Centers From a Culture of Community Service to Community Engagement and Integration. Consuelo H. Wilkins, MD, MSci; Philip M. Alberti, PhD Association of American Medical Colleges, Washington, DC, 2020

missions at a healthcare institution including research, service learning, and health care delivery redesign.

The recent increase in community engagement strategies is driven by multiple changes in our environment, including:

- Preparing the future health professional workforce to integrate social care and clinical services;

- Payment models that shift from payment for services to payment for health outcomes;

- Research focused on solving health challenges that are meaningful to the communities and will be implemented and sustained in the community.

Despite increasing interest in community engagement practices, many health professionals and researchers are not trained in these methods. Often there are multiple definitions for the same term, multiple frameworks for organizing activities, and a paucity of measures to evaluate the quality of engagement.

The Dartmouth Community Engaged Scholarship resources are presented as a "starting point" for those who seek to learn more about community engagement. Learning together, we hope to advance the health and health equity of our communities.

Principles and Practices of Community Engagement

Community engagement can take many different forms and can be used to achieve different goals, e.g. research, policy change, health promotion. The concept of community engagement is to bring people together to solve the problems and address the concerns that matter to them. The process should be durable, long-lasting, and equitable to all who participate with goal to influence social action, programs and practices for the betterment of the community.

A motto of engagement is: "Nothing about us, without us."

CDC Principles and Practices for Community Engagement (paraphrased)[4]

1. Be clear about goals of engagement and populations to be engaged
2. Become knowledgeable about the community and the perceptions of those initiating the engagement
3. Go to the community, build relationships and trust, seek commitment
4. Accept collective self-determination is the right of the community
5. Partner with community
6. Recognize community diversity in all aspects of the engagement work
7. To sustain the gain, recognize community assets and strength and build capacity
8. Be prepared to give control to the community and be flexible to changing needs.
9. Make long-term commitments
10. Demonstrating trustworthiness is critical to sustained engagement

- The Center for Advancing Rural Health Equity (CARHE) has a set of principles that guide their equity work. For more information: https://www.dartmouth-health.org/carhe
- Vermont Community Engagement Guide: https://healthycommunitiesvt.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Community-Engagement-Guidance-and-Best-Practices.pdf
- Community Tool Box Online Training from the University of Kansas: https://training.ctb.ku.edu/

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[4] https://ictr.johnshopkins.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CTSAPrinciplesofCommunityEngagement.pdf

Principles and Practices of Community Engagement

The table below outlines several recommended practices to effectively implement the CDC Principles of Community Engagement.

Principle	Practices
Be clear about goals of engagement and populations to be engaged	• Review the CDC Community Engagement Continuum (p. 8) and identify the stage of engagement appropriate for this project • Review the Intersectionality/Social Identity Wheel to consider how identities and power/positionality may be reflected in your work.
Become knowledgeable about community and the perceptions of those initiating the engagement	• Review community health assessments (examples listed in *Sources of Demographic Data and Health Outcomes*) for health and social needs data and priorities in the places/groups you wish to engage. • Search online for community organizations, affiliation groups, and others relevant to your study. Use the starter list of search terms in *Finding Community Partners at Dartmouth* if helpful. • Explore history, cultures, and characteristics of places/groups to be engaged. What experiences have they had with Dartmouth/researchers in the past?
Go to the community, build relationships and trust, seek commitment	• Consider listening sessions, interviews, town halls, Community Engagement Studios etc. to allow

	people to hear about and influence your project • Use the [Questions to Discuss with Your Research Partner(s)](#) guide to help shape a mutual dialogue with partner(s) about your intended project. • Ask to join existing organization/community meetings to learn about their work. • Consider volunteering with community partners to benefit their existing work.
Accept that collective determination is the right of the community	• Identify ways that and project participants/partners can request a halt/pause in project activities and decisions. Consider use of ['Levels/Gradients of Agreement'](#) or other [participatory decision approaches](#) .
Partner with Community	• Regularly ask participants and partners for feedback on activities and 'how can we improve?' Consider more formal evaluation of effective partnerships, such as the [REST tool](#) when suitable. • Create a plan for inform research participants and partners about the results/findings of your work. Consider how you could invite participants to co-analyze the data you gather.
Respect Community Diversity in all aspects of the engagement work	• Research your own assumptions, [implicit bias](#), and cultural norms and how they may impact your

	interactions with participants/partners in your project. • Explore how you can develop skills/attributes of [cultural humility](#). • Review the [APA Style & Grammar Guidelines for Bias-Free Language](#) • Explore [positionality, power differentials](#), and other facilitators and barriers to engagement and participation of persons of varied [social identities.](#) • Check the reading level of your surveys and other materials for patients/study participants by checking text in the [Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level Calculator](#)
To sustain the gain, recognize community assets and strengths and build capacity	• Use the Starter List of Community Resources to start a search for organizations and community groups that may already bring your study population together. • During project planning, identify whether your study will create information or services that ideally would be sustained post-study, and if applicable, develop a [sustainability plan](#) for your work. • Review concepts of [Asset-Based Community Development](#) to consider the ways in which the community you are studying has existing strengths that your work can contribute to and that can help

	sustain work after your research has ended.
Be prepared to give control to the community and be flexible to changing needs	• Identify who can serve as community advisors/co-creators for your project. When possible, consider Community Advisory Boards that already meet. • Consider use of 'Levels/Gradients of Agreement' or other participatory decision approaches. • Explore engaging participants and/or community organizations as co-researchers .
Make Long-Term Commitments	• Talk transparently with research participants and partner organizations about what your engagement will be with them once the research project is concluded. • Host follow-up conversations with partners about the results of your research and/or encourage them to help you make meaning of the results of your work.
Demonstrating trustworthiness is critical to sustained engagement	• Build partnerships around bidirectional communication and identify problems and solutions that are meaningful and beneficial to the community. • Refer to The Principles of Trustworthiness.