

VOICES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
A KEY TO RACIAL EQUITY

WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY?

Racial equity exists when all people have access to the opportunities available and outcomes are not predictable by race.

WHAT IS AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Authentic community engagement is the intentional process of co-creating solutions to inequities in partnership with people who know through their own experiences the barriers to opportunity best. Authentic community engagement is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect and that acknowledge each person's added value to the developing solutions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines community engagement as "the process of working **collaboratively** with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests or similar situations with respect to **issues affecting their well-being.**"

WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

"Relationships we develop with our coalition partners must be transformative, not transactional." -- Reverend Dr. William Barber

Racial disparities are prevalent across multiple opportunity areas, from education to employment to health. These inequities hurt all of us – by weakening our economic, social, and cultural web of connection. Strengthening that web and building sustainable and transformative change requires deep partnership with communities for achieving racial, cultural, social and economic equity. This partnership is the backbone of community engagement. Rather than informing, educating, consulting, or merely having a dialogue with the community, true community engagement relies on partnerships and co-creation.

PRINCIPLES OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A. Intention leads to better process and outcomes.

1. Address racism. Authentic community engagement intentionally addresses issues of race, institutional and structural racism, discrimination and exclusion, and embodies "cultural humility."

2. Agree on the process. The expectations, values, purpose, and role of both the institutions/systems and the stakeholder communities should be discussed and negotiated at the very beginning of any engagement process.

3. *Balance power.* Stakeholders should be aware of any working assumptions, and of power dynamics and how they impact the development, sustainability, and success of partnerships. They should be intentional in addressing power imbalances especially those affecting the ability of the community to act as an equal partner.

4. *Self-determination is a right.* “Remember and accept that collective self-determination is the responsibility and right of all people in a community. No external entity should assume it can bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest.” -- CDC *Principles of Authentic Community Engagement*

5. *Recognize different kinds of groups.* Groups often self-organize. For instance, communities organically organize beyond community-based organizations (e.g. Soccer League, Churches, Barber Shop, Coffee Shop).

6. *Notice assets.* Sustain efforts and support community ownership by using an asset approach, where community strengths are at the base of the work and the tool to develop capacity within communities and within your organization

7. *See different experiences.* Recognize, respect and appreciate the diversity/differences within and across communities. Awareness of the factors impacting communities’ ability to exercise their power (like historical trauma, oppression, disenfranchisement, etc.) must be intentionally addressed while co-creating, planning, designing, and implementing approaches to engage a community.

8. *Commit to communities.* Ensure that engagement efforts leave the community better.

9. *Stay in it for the long term.* Community collaboration requires long-term commitment by organizations involved and their partners.

B. Grounded in respect and appreciation.

1. *Work with communities.* The goal of authentic community engagement is to work WITH communities NOT FOR, on behalf of, or to do things TO communities.

2. *Seek authentic representation.* Make sure that representative members of the communities are authentically representing their community. They should be well-respected and have honest and genuine relationships with other members of their community.

3. *Understand the historical context* in which previous attempts of engagement have been occurring. What are the stories of success, lessons learned, barriers, and tensions?

4. *Immerse yourself in the community,* “establish relationships, build trust, work with the formal and informal leadership, and seek commitment from community organizations and leaders” to co-create (create together) solutions. -- CDC *Principles of Authentic Community Engagement*

5. *Recognize the contributions* of the community.

6. *Allocate resources* for community members to be active participants, so that community engagement is valued for its contribution to the process (e.g. offer stipends, child care, food, interpreters).

C. Tension and partnership work together.

1. *Address challenges.* Develop a plan to address conflict, being intentional and strategic to transform challenges into opportunities.

2. *Share power.* Be ready to share power (release control of actions and/or interventions) with communities, and be flexible and creative to meet its changing challenges

3. *Expect tension.* Authentic engagement is not necessarily easy or peaceful. Partnership in a change process will sometimes result in tension. Partners will challenge and hold each other accountable for staying true to principles for engagement and to goals for racial equity.