

Community Engagement

A theoretical presentation of the concept
and a suggestion of techniques



Relational model of Community Engagement (Kim A. Johnston ,2010)

The trend to a more socially-inclusive and responsive form of organisational decision-making supports an increasing belief that engaging a community for specific programs can lead to better organisational and social outcomes (Adams & Hess, 2001; Bruning, McGrew, & Cooper, 2006; Everett, 2001).

The Engagement Philosophy

Community engagement is a communication strategy or philosophy that orientates and drives a community communication program. In a community setting, engagement provides a high level of interest by community members in a key problem or topic and may predispose members to act, be involved, or even ignore the topic or issue. Engagement is described a set of attitudes that predispose an individual to action (Barkan, 1998, p. 64). These views rely on interest, trust, knowledge, a sense of civic pride, and a feeling of belonging and support held by the individual (Barkan, 1998). Engagement is characterised by effort and emotional involvement and is an important motivator for action, or as Barkan Zimmer-Gembeck et. al (2006). Barkan suggests engagement is an important motivator for action, or as ZimmerGembeck et. al (2006) describe, as observable demonstrations of motivation characterised by effort and emotional involvement. The act of engaging therefore needs to be based on appeals of relevance, context, emotion, and problem recognition (Littlejohn, 1999). Community engagement thus captures both the intent of communicating with a community group and the facilitating of actions to empower community members' interest. Community engagement therefore creates and demands a context conducive for organization-public communication as the goal is to enable organizations to make decisions that reflect representative opinions for social and civic benefits (Adams & Hess, 2001).

Community Engagement Typology

Community engagement is achieved through activities that develop knowledge, skills, values and motivation (O'Connor, 2006). In practice, this is achieved through the creation of awareness and interest of community members through communication programs such as community information, community consultation, and community participation.



Community information

Successful community engagement is founded on effective, appropriate, and timely information provided to community members. The act of engaging, gaining attention and interest in information provided to communities needs to be based on appeals of relevance, context, emotion, and problem recognition (Littlejohn, 1999). A community information program in the context of community engagement can be defined as the one-way dissemination of concepts (information) relating to a topic or problem to a pre-defined community group, public, or individual members of a community.

Community consultation

Community consultation is defined as the process used to solicit opinions and views by individuals and interested community members relating to a specific organisation-defined issue. Community consultation also recognises that although community members groups may exert influence, the organisation retains the right to make the decision (Bishop & Davis, 2002; Brackertz, Zwart, Meredyth, & Ralston, 2005; Thomas, 1990). The purpose of community consultation therefore is to capture a diverse range of opinions from interested community members, rather than capturing the views of every community member (Spicker, 2006).

Community Participation

Community participation suggests an active role by community members in the creation of meaning and developing solutions to complex social problems or proposed solutions that affect a specific community (Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007). In the context of a typology of community engagement, community participation is conceptualised as the active involvement by community members to jointly develop meanings and negotiate solutions to an issue through dialogic processes in interaction with the focal organisation.



Key concepts

Community engagement may involve the use of particular key concepts relevant to the community benefit sector such as: friend-raising, community impact planning, community-driven governance, asset-based resource development, vision-based community impact planning, organizational wellness planning, building programs on shared resources, community sleuthing, and community-based program development.

Public Participation Spectrum

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.



		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.



Principles of Community Engagement (Mina Silberberg et al. 2011)

Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.

Concept of community

Systems Perspective - From a systems perspective, a community is similar to a living creature, comprising different parts that represent specialized functions, activities, or interests, each operating within specific boundaries to meet community needs.

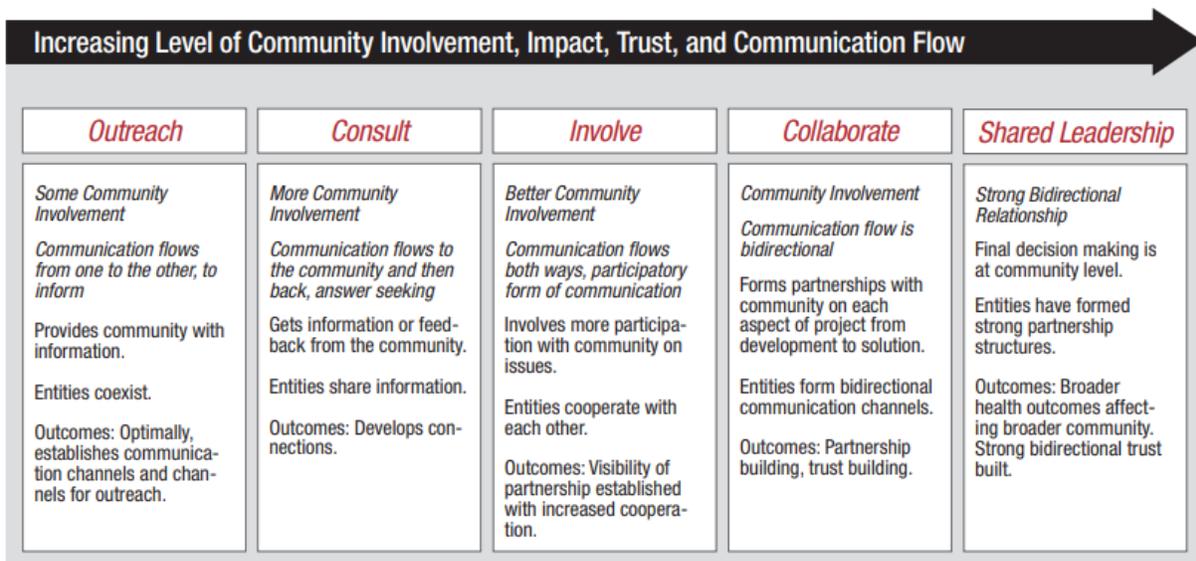
Social perspective - A community can also be defined by describing the social and political networks that link individuals, community organizations, and leaders. Understanding these networks is critical to planning efforts in engagement.

Virtual Perspective - Some communities map onto geographically defined areas, but today, individuals rely more and more on computer-mediated communications to access information, meet people, and make decisions that affect their lives (Kozinets, 2002).

Individual Perspective - Individuals have their own sense of community membership that is beyond the definitions of community applied by researchers and engagement leaders. Moreover, they may have a sense of belonging to more than one community. In addition, their sense of membership can change over time and may affect their participation in community activities (Minkler et al. 2004).

Concept of community engagement

Community engagement can be seen as a continuum of community involvement.



Community Participation

Community engagement requires participation of community members in projects that address their issues. Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility. Among the factors that motivate people to participate are wanting to play an active role in bettering their own lives, fulfilling social or religious obligations, feeling a need for a sense of community, and wanting cash or in-kind rewards. Whatever people's motivations, obtaining meaningful community participation and having a successful, sustained initiative require that engagement leaders respect, listen to, and learn from community members. An absence of mutual respect and co-learning can result in a loss of time, trust, resources, and, most importantly, effectiveness (Henry, 2011; Miller et al., 2005; Minkler et al., 2009).

Community Empowerment

The theoretical roots of "empowerment" as a critical element of community engagement can be traced back to Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (Freire, 1970; Hur, 2006). As articulated by Kenneth Maton (2008), empowerment is "a group-based participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization". Ideally, empowerment is both a process and an outcome of community engagement.

Coalition Building

Community engagement often involves building coalitions, defined by Cohen et al. (2002) as "a union of people and organizations working to influence outcomes on a specific problem" (p. 144). The goals of a coalition might range from sharing information and resources to advocating for specific policy changes (Cohen et al. 2002).



Principles

1. Be clear about the purposes or goals of the engagement effort and the populations and/or communities you want to engage. Those wishing to engage the community need to be able to communicate to that community why its participation is worthwhile.
2. Become knowledgeable about the community's culture, economic conditions, social networks, political and power structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, and experience with efforts by outside groups to engage it in various programs. Learn about the community's perceptions of those initiating the engagement activities. It is important to learn as much about the community as possible, through both qualitative and quantitative methods, and from as many sources as feasible.
3. Go to the community, establish relationships, build trust, work with the formal and informal leadership, and seek commitment from community organizations and leaders to create processes for mobilizing the community. Engagement is based on community support.
4. 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. Just because an institution or organization introduces itself into the community does not mean that it automatically becomes of the community.
5. All aspects of community engagement must recognize and respect the diversity of the community. Awareness of the various cultures of a community and other factors affecting diversity must be paramount in planning, designing, and implementing approaches to engaging a community. Diversity may be related to economic, educational, employment, or health status as well as differences in culture, language, race, ethnicity, age, gender, mobility, literacy, or personal interest.
6. Community engagement can only be sustained by identifying and mobilizing community assets and strengths and by developing the community's capacity and resources to make decisions and take action. Community assets include the interests, skills, and experiences of individuals and local organizations as well as the networks of relationships that connect them
7. Organizations that wish to engage a community as well as individuals seeking to effect change must be prepared to release control of actions or interventions to the community and be flexible enough to meet its changing needs. Engaging the community is ultimately about facilitating community-driven action.
8. Community collaboration requires long-term commitment by the engaging organization and its partners.



Suggested Community engagement techniques by Action Synergy

POL - Popular Opinion Leader

The POL methodology is elaborated by the Center for AIDS Intervention Research (CAIR), Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. POL has been transferred to HESED, in the frame of the Global AIDS Intervention Network (GAIN).

What is a Popular Opinion Leader?

Certain people in any community population are persons who are very popular with others in their group of friends and acquaintances. These are often the people who talk with others the most, are best-liked, and are more popular. About 10- 15 % of any population are usually its opinion leaders. Those are people whose opinions and beliefs lead the views of others.

What is POL model?

POL is a model that identifies and trains naturally popular and well-liked people in a community to function as educators of their social networks.

Why POL is effective?

POL is based on the idea that new behavioral trends can be established when enough popular people whose opinions are valued by others actively are seen and heard to endorse a new value. Called "social diffusion theory", interventions based on this model: identify POLs from within a community target population, teach them to talk with others about the new behavior, enlist these POLs to carry out conversations with others.

The POL intervention is powerful because the messages come to community members from people they personally know and like, from their own friends.



Steps for building the intervention

1. Providing information
2. Work with attitudes
3. Building intention
4. Planning the change
5. Building self-confidence

Phases of the intervention

1. Pre- implementation

Two main tasks: Select the location/community of intervention, select the Popular Opinion Leaders.

2. Implementation (5 sessions)

Main tasks: To train POLs to disseminate the message, create self-confidence in POLs that they could make it.

3. Maintenance (4 sessions)

Main task: To support and reinforce the POLs reshape social norms and believes

4. Evaluation

Main task: To measure the progress



Drama Education

Community engagement can be succeeded via drama education because it makes community members participate in a procedure that emotionally involves them. They feel the importance of it and it impacts their will to spread it.

What is drama? (InSite Drama 2018)

- Drama creates possibilities for contextualised learning – problem, themes, event can be seen within a specific context and from the perspective of people affected by them.
- Drama helps us in the deeper understanding of certain problems.
- Working with the problem in the focus of our work might be emotionally and/or intellectually challenging and demanding – there is always our humanity at stake. However, this opens up the potential for deeper learning and understanding of our societies and ourselves in it.
- We look at these problems from different aspects and different points of view, frequently changing perspective during the drama work.
- We build a fictive but detailed context: we build a story by creating specific situations.
- On one hand, fiction helps distancing and protecting.
- On the other hand, fiction helps deep engagement. Drama happens in our head by activating our imagination.

In drama, we frequently change workforms and perspectives:

- Working in large groups / small groups / pairs / individually
- Watching / listening / discussing / creating still images / improvisation / directing
- Working with the site / working with the character / working with the problem / working with the story
- Building the story / listening to the narrative
- Perspective of the bully / accomplice / bystander / victim / teacher / parent
- Fiction, story / reflection, present



The basic steps of structuring drama

1. Setting the aims

- Who am I working with? (age, size of group, maturity of group, experience in drama, any other important features, e.g. special needs)
- What am I interested in? What is the purpose of the dramatic process?
- What are the interest of the group? What is my aim with their subject of interest?

2. Setting the situation

- Place
- Time
- Roles
 - who are we playing?
 - what is the frame distance?
- Problem within the fiction
 - tension
 - its relation to the problems in reality

3. Planning the steps to build the situation, to deepen in and reflect on it

4. Planning the roles and the questions of the facilitator

