SCARBOROUGH
civic action network

A Guide to Community Engagement & Outreach for Community Groups

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY GROUPS THROUGHOUT SCARBOROUGH

A Guide to Community Engagement & Outreach

Developed by:
The Community Engagement Team at Agincourt Community Services Association
Jessica Roher
Farnaz Behrooz
Malsan Gananendran
Laura Harper
Melanie Hawco
Rezwan Karim
Lara Lukaniuk
Jaclyn San Antonio

Edited By:
Farnaz Behrooz

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For more information, please contact:
Scarborough Civic Action Network
Website| www.scarboroughcan.ca
Telephone | 416-409-3456 x409
Email | scarboroughcivicactionnetwork@gmail.com

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"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used when I die, for the harder I work the more I live."

- George Bernard Shaw

Those who dedicate their time and efforts to community engagement and outreach do so out of a sense of service to the greater community and with a commitment to improving the community for all that live and work in it. Community engagement and outreach is about working at the **grassroots*** level with local communities.

Asterisks (*) throughout this guidebook indicate that the word is explained in the Glossary on page 26.

This resource aims to guide readers to envision themselves as active members of Scarborough's communities who promote community engagement.

What is a community?

Broadly, a community is a group of people who are united because they share a sense of belonging. For example, they can share histories, experiences, interests, values, beliefs, customs, religions, skills, identities and so on. Individuals may also be a part of a community based on where they live, work or socialize.

This guide specifically focuses on neighbourhood communities – communities that are defined by a geographic area where people live and work.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement takes place when individuals and groups from the community collaboratively work together to address and solve issues that affect them (Tamarak). It is when people develop a sense of collective vision or collective ownership of the community, and implement changes for the benefit of their community.

Community engagement is essential to building and improving vibrant communities because it encourages citizens to identify and address local ideas, concerns and opportunities. Community work is all about getting people on board to contribute to positive changes in communities by working together towards and advocating for change.

What does community engagement look like?

Forms of community engagement can include…

- Volunteering
- Participating in a workshop, community meeting or event
- Staying informed of community issues and news
- Joining an advisory committee to improve community and public services
- Getting involved in politics
- Advocating for better services in the community

When community members volunteer, take responsibility for what is happening in their community, have a sense of ownership of their community and invest in their community, conflict decreases and there is increased trust between community members.

In the context of community work and community development, local organizations use engagement to ensure that their work reflects the local population and that services continue to be relevant to members of the community. Organizers need to be accountable to the communities they serve.

Why is community engagement important?

With strong engagement, communities will…

- Have stronger social support networks
- Be more aware of community resources
- Tend to have better public services
- Have resources that are targeted more effectively
- Have services that are better tailored to local needs
- Have more lasting and sustainable change occurring over time
- Identify issues more quickly and develop more effective solutions for them

What is community outreach?

Community outreach is about getting messages out into communities. Effective community outreach consists of employing a number of different methods to communicate with the community as a whole.

Generally, community outreach is done in order to inform the community of activities. This is done through, for instance, promoting events that build the capacity and skills of people in the community, helping members of the community and bringing the community together for the benefit of all.

We will provide a number of tips and techniques to do community outreach efficiently and effectively. Outreach is an essential part of building engagement in communities and requires passion and commitment to effectively perform.

A look at your community ⬭ ⬭

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used when I die, for the harder I work the more I live."

- George Bernard Shaw

O rganizing in inner-city suburbs is not like organizing in downtown areas. Suburbs are spread out, quiet and contained. Each community is separated by fairly large distances, it is difficult to walk from place to place and as a result, the concept of community is quite different in areas such as Scarborough.

Geography as a barrier

Scarborough is a big area that is made up of many communities and neighbourhoods. It is not a walk-able part of our city. Communities tend to be self contained and as a result, community organizing occurs at a very local level in pockets or specific communities where engagement is common.

Immigration in Scarborough

Scarborough is home to large immigrant communities. These communities can sometimes live in silos, only socializing and associating with other individuals from their communities due to language barriers, cultural differences, spatial limitations, or diverging ideas of community.

To be successful, community engagement initiatives need to recognize and be respectful of immigrant communities, doing everything possible to include their voices or opinions in improving the community. Efforts should always be made to

have translators and invite individuals from different communities. Moreover, community outreach leadership should be encouraged and promoted within these communities for better sustainability and efficacy of building communities.

Culture of Community Engagement

Many people in Scarborough are comfortable in engaging in subtle forms of change. For example, we do not have rallies or protests in Scarborough. As of yet, no one has 'occupied the Scarborough Town Centre' or marched the streets! There is a reason for that. Organizing in Scarborough and other city suburbs is *different* – it is about discussion and change through negotiation and debate.

A LOOK AT THE SCARBOROUGH COMMUNITY

Population: 602,575   **Growth Rate:** 2.4% (Higher than average)

Visible Minority Status: 67.4% (Higher than Toronto average)

Top 3 non-English languages spoken: Chinese, Cantonese, Tamil
Top 3 Ethnic Origin Groups: Chinese, East Indian, Filipino

First-Generation Immigrants: 68.1% (Higher than Toronto average)
Second-Generation Immigrants: 16.4%

Couples with Children: 51.5%
Single-Parents: 20.9%
Couples without Children: 27.5% (Lower than average)

Home Owners: 65.8% (Higher than average)
Dwelling Type: Mostly high-rise apartments and single-detached houses

Obtained certificate, diploma, or degree: 77.8%
Average Private Household Income: $65,385 (Toronto's average: $80,343)
Low income population: 25.8%
Unemployment rate: 8.8% (Canada's rate: 7.2%)
Modes of Transportation for work: Automobile (72%), Transit (26%)

Source: 2006 Census

Community engagement

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- George Bernard Shaw

Learn About Your Community

Before you start any initiative, you should have a clear sense of what the community's priorities and needs are. One way of getting to know about your community is to research the demographic make-up of the community. In the previous section, we got a very basic sense of the Scarborough demographic, which helps to determine the best ways of engaging the community. If your initiative does not respond to an identified community priority or need, it will not be successful. To get a better sense of the community, take a field trip around the spatial area of the community and ask yourself a few questions. Finally, get to know people! Meet community members and discuss what concerns them in their community and how they normally tackle issues that arise. Ask them about why they chose to live in their communities and why they enjoy living there. Get a sense of their favourite places to go, and their favourite things to do in their community. Ask them if there are parts of their community they would like to see improved and why.

Other helpful areas to research
- Retired population
- Travel times to and from work/school
- Access to transportation
- Number and types of recreational space
- Number of libraries
- Types of businesses and employment
- Crime rates (and the types of crime)
- Homeless population and poverty rates
- Status of health
- Birth rate

Take a field trip to the community!

How many people are on the bus or at bus stops; at what times; where are they going and what are they like? How many people walk in the community?

How many cars are on the road in the morning, afternoon, and evening?

How many large businesses are there; how many local businesses are there?

How many and what kinds of businesses or organizations offer services in a non-English language?

How many and what kinds of community events are taking place this month?

How many public spaces are around for people to access? What do they look like?

How many people are in the libraries? When? What for? What are they like?"

Where do people mostly hang out when they're not a home?

Are there visible homeless people on the streets?

Resist thinking about 'the community' as a homogenous entity. It is important to be aware that Scarborough, like any other community, is not a homogenous group. Even the neighbourhoods within Scarborough aren't homogenous! You will find a variety of neighborhoods that are quite different from each other. All communities are made up of individuals, each with their own ideas, experiences and issues. The risk of losing sight of the individuals within a community is that you may tokenize the community and make decisions that are counterproductive to community engagement.

Identify strengths and assets in the community. While some organizers tend to be able to easily identify challenges and barriers faced by the community, it is just as important to identify the community's strengths and assets. This can help to build on engagement effectively as you are able to work with the community based on their strengths. *Does the community have accessible public space to hold events? Does the community have strong networks and relationships with other communities or organizations that they can partner with? Do community members spread news and information to their social networks effectively? Does the community have neighborhood community initiatives in place such as neighborhood watches and welcome wagons?* These are just a few of many areas where you may find strength and assets in the community.

Engage and Build Relationships in the Community

There are often many initiatives taking place in communities and not everyone will be interested in getting involved or contributing to each initiative. When you are speaking with people about the community and encouraging them to get involved, encourage them to participate in things that matter to them or that they would enjoy being a part of.

Be out in the community. Be present and visible. As a community organizer, you should be in the community as much as possible. Networking, meeting people and talking about what matters to them is essential to being a good organizer.

Good community workers network and build strong relationships based on trust and respect with the residents of the community. They spend time speaking to residents about the challenges they have, what they aspire to be and how they think that they can contribute to their community. Be innovative when setting up new initiatives and take into consideration what you hear from members of the community.

Holding Successful Community Meetings

When you organize meetings in communities, there is never a guarantee of involvement from members. These strategies can help you to ensure that your meetings are successful and well attended.

Have a clear agenda or purpose to the meeting or event. Community members are very busy with their families and jobs. You want to ensure that the meetings they participate in are a good use of their time and accomplish something. In order to do this, you need to have a clear agenda or purpose to the meeting or event. The event should stick to the agenda as close as possible so that people's expectations are met.

Hold accessible meetings. You want to ensure that your meetings are as convenient as possible for community members. Most people work so if you want to hold a large community meeting, you need to hold it in the evening. Consider that some people need time to get from work or pick up their children from school, so try to hold your meetings after business and school hours. However, if you are holding a meeting for seniors or retired residents, it may be more convenient to hold meetings during the day.

In Scarborough, and other inner city suburbs, it is very difficult to get around without a car. If your meeting is meant to attract people across Scarborough, make sure that it central and accessible by transit for people that are coming from every part of Scarborough. If you are holding a large Scarborough-wide meeting, consider the Scarborough Civic Center as a place to hold the event. If you are holding a meeting in a specific neighbourhood, consider holding the event at a community organization, public library, or even in the park (if it's a nice day and your meeting is informal!).

Hold meeting in the community. Make sure you know which location is most convenient for the residents you want to attract. If you want to hold a community meeting for a specific community, hold the meeting directly in the community. It is important to note that many residents in Scarborough are fickle about location. Sometimes you may find that residents will not attend a meeting even if it is a few blocks away or across a major street! Make sure you do research regarding which spaces community members regularly meet at to ensure that your meeting is successful.
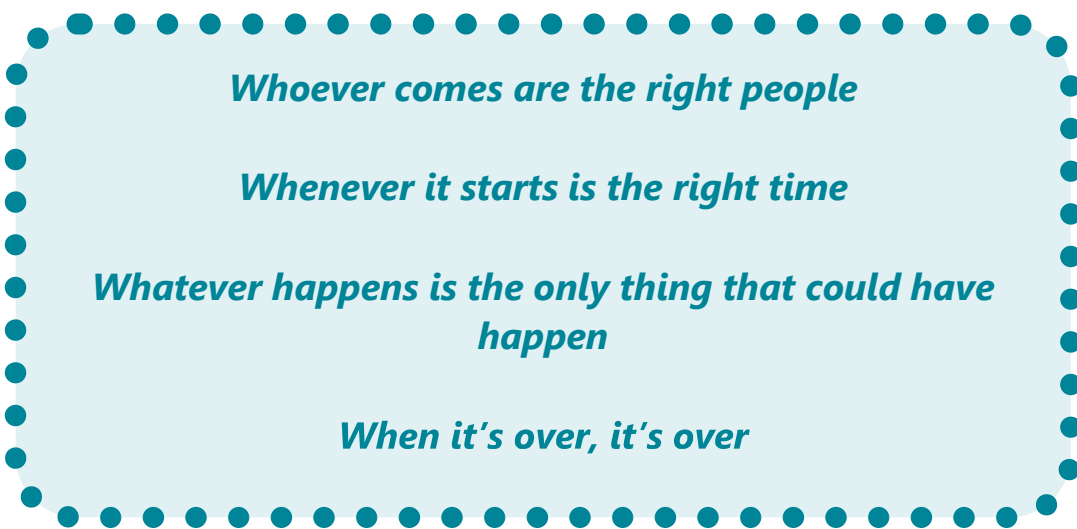
Tip
If you want specific communities to attend an event that is far from their community, see if it is possible to provide a school bus to transport members of the community to and from the event.

Provide services to encourage participation, if possible. One of the reasons that people do not participate in community events is because there are barriers to participation. If you are able to offer the following services, you will be able to draw a larger audience and engage more community members.
- A meal if the event is held during meal times
- Child care
- Transit tokens or school bus transportation

Provide translation and recognize that good conversations happen in all languages. Due to high immigrant and refugee populations in Toronto, it has become extremely important to provide translation services at community meetings. This is essential if we want to be inclusive, and hear the needs and expectations of all residents in the community. If you are not able to provide translation services at the event, consider having translated documents handed out to community members for greater participation.

If you are stressed or concerned about the success of your event, just remember…

> ### Whoever comes are the right people
>
> ### Whenever it starts is the right time
>
> ### Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happen
>
> ### When it's over, it's over

Community outreach ● ━ ● ━ ● ━ ●

"Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
<div align="right">- Margaret Mead</div>

O utreach is simply put the process of communicating with communities and community members. Outreach can be done for the purposes of promotion, education, research, information, connection, or providing services. The goal of outreach is to get information into a given community and, in the context of community engagement, it is also to get community members more involved in what is happening in their community.

Outreach is NOT just about posting flyers in a community. It is about speaking with people, sending emails, using social media, calling people and encouraging residents to forward information to others.

In order to do effective community outreach, you need to use a number of methods to reach as many people as possible and employ a number of strategies.

> ### Methods of Community Outreach
> - **Posting and emailing flyers throughout the community** (e.g. community boards at libraries, community centers, agencies, businesses, etc.)
> - **Developing an email network & sending information through your contact list** (always ask people if they would like to be on your contact list before hand, as you do not want to be a spammer! If you develop a large email network, consider using such programs as *Mail Chimp*, *Survey Monkey*, or other email and survey management networks)
> - **Calling residents** (only call residents who have provided you with their phone numbers or have consented to having their contact information shared. Be considerate of the time of day before calling)
> - **Using social media** (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Websites, Blogs, etc.)
> - **Speaking to people in the community** (either informally at a public space, or at community events)
> - **Attending events** (this is a great way to network and talk to people about what you do and what events you are promoting)
> - **Sending information through other people's networks and using partners to help with outreach.** (Always ask for permission to send information out search for partners with common goals)
> - **Use the media to get the information out** (if you are holding a large or important event, invite the local newspaper to cover the event)

Check out our guidebook on Developing Effective Media Strategies!

Strategies for Community Outreach

There are a number of strategies that non profits use to do effective community outreach that is respectful of the community and engages those that they intend to engage.

Make sure you have outreach materials to provide people. When you go to a community event and want to promote or inform the community, make sure that you have materials to provide people with. Create brochures, pamphlets, one-pagers, and/or business cards. If you have an email list, don't forget to bring your 'sign-up to our email list' sheet!

> **Tip**
>
> Print your flyers in colour, if possible. People will be more attracted to the flyer and it will seem more legitimate and professional.

All outreach materials should be written in clearly and concisely. Do not overload promotional materials with information – it should only contain the information that is *necessary*. For example, if you are holding an event, the flyer should only include:

- Title of the event
- Short explanation of the event (1 sentence)
- Event objectives or why people should participate
- Date, time and location of your event
- The organizer's contact information

Provide translated materials. When possible, provide translated materials to communities with a high population of members who are not as experienced reading in English.

Know your audience and use appropriate messaging. Different communities respond messages differently. When writing your material, consider whether your language is too formal, not formal enough, needs visual material, needs large print, and so on. If you are holding an event that welcomes everyone from the community and beyond, make sure to make it clear that your event is 'open', or 'inclusive' or 'welcoming'. Some people need to be certain that you *want* them there. If the event is limited to certain members of the community, be clear to mention that in your materials.

Connect with a variety of resident leaders and other community organizers. Tap into their networks. Spreading the word is much quicker and easier you involve other leaders and organizers in the community. Be ready to provide extra copies of your materials (along with your contact information) so that others can hand them out.

Go to where the people are. In order to reach a wide audience and engage those who might not be naturally attracted to getting involved in their communities, make sure that you do outreach where people are. For example, frequent malls, restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations and community centers.

> **Tip**
>
> A great location to do outreach is at a school when parents pick up their kids, or in the mornings or evenings when people go to or come home from work. If you do outreach in these spaces, make sure you ask for permission from the school or apartment manager.

When to do Outreach

It is really important to do your outreach at a time that works for the community, rather than when is convenient for you.

Don't start too early & don't start too late. If you start too early, people will forget about the event and why they might want to go. (However, you should start to plan and organize your event from early on.) At the same time, people's lives are busy and their schedules fill up quickly so you don't want to wait too long to do outreach. Start outreach between two-three weeks before your event, and gear up as the event gets closer!

Follow up with people. About a week before the event, it is good to follow up with people that you spoke to or emailed. Send another email out and call residents to ask if they are still planning to attend the meeting/event.

It's not over! It is just as important to continue your outreach initiatives after the event so that people do not forget about the initiatives taking place in their community. Always follow up with residents to see if they enjoyed the event. If there were some unanswered questions during the event, be sure to follow up either at another meeting or email (whichever is quicker) to provide them with answers. If there are any materials handed out during the event, be sure to email them a copy in case they would like to forward it to others. Performing outreach strategies after your event or project will help keep the momentum of community engagement rolling. Keep performing outreach strategies in between projects and events in order to build larger and stronger networks, and enhance engagement levels of the community.

Building a Strong Community: Best Practices

"Average people and the average community can change the world. You can do it just based on common sense, determination, persistence and patience."

- Lois Gibbs

Community engagement is a process that process takes time and effort. It requires bringing people together, establishing trust and relationships, developing collective goals, building capacity and working to create change.

Community engagement is about building consensus, identifying community needs and creating momentum within communities to address issues and create solutions. The change that results from community engagement can be change in attitudes, building social capital or promoting economic and environmental development. Below are eight examples of best practices when building strong community engagement in Scarborough.

1. Meaningful Inclusion

Community engagement is **not** about consultation or representation. This kind of 'engagement' can be seen as **tokenism*** or rubberstamping. It can be ineffective and counterproductive, leaving community members feeling used and angry.
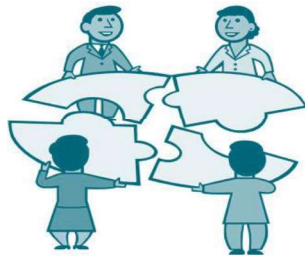
Meaningful inclusion is about *involving* the community in identifying problems and opportunities, and creating solutions on their own terms. This could include involving community members in planning local policies or projects or participating in a community barbeque.

The more ambitious levels of engagement include elements of empowerment and development. This enables the community to envision its own future and actively participate in making this vision happen. The goal is community development - to improve the quality of life of individuals in the community. Having community members take part in the process every step of the way not only improves effective community engagement, but it also legitimizes your efforts as well.

While including all **stakeholders*** in the community development process is evidently important, there are some challenges to ensuring its practices. Communities are made of people who have a wide and diverse set of interests, knowledge, experiences, and concerns. As a best practice, it is important to make sure that as many voices are heard as possible when taking initiatives to improve communities.

Moreover, you may find that while developing community engagement, you receive responses from those who are usually engaged, but little or no responses from those

are not. This may result in a pattern of investing your efforts to the already engaged, while excluding those who have little or no knowledge of what you do! Community engagement should involve those who might not normally be included through traditional routes, ensuring that everyone has a voice. Be sure to always practice effective and *innovative* outreach initiatives, reaching parts of the community who have had little or no contact with your engagement efforts.

Quick Tips...

- **Be open, accessible and approachable** (e.g. provide contact information you are willing to share with community members, have a regular scheduled time when you are working in the community so that people can reach you, etc.)
- **Meet people in places they are comfortable with** (e.g. at a public space, somewhere very close to their home location, somewhere with full accessibility, etc.)
- **Show that you care about other people's thoughts and opinions** (e.g. limit being outspoken on your or other people's opinions and instead listen and take in other people's opinions)
- **Maximize the opportunity for participation by the community** (e.g. consider translators, appropriate location and times, childcare, transportation, and safety, etc.)
- **Develop skills and capacity of the community** (e.g. offer workshops, world café style meetings, forums, etc.)
- **Give individuals the opportunity to take leadership roles** (e.g. provide meaningful volunteer roles, set up training programs, invite members to spear-head a project, etc.)

2. Organization: Planning is Essential

Check out our guidebook on Developing a Workable Work Plan!

Needless to say, those who take initiative to promote community engagement do so out of a sense of passion. **Dream big, start small.** It is impossible to solve all the challenges faced by the community in one day, but if you prioritize and take small steps to achieve your goals, you may end up achieving more than you expect! After developing informed strategies to improve the community, **set concrete and clear aims and objectives** for engagement activities so that everyone understands the issues you are working on and what the goals of their efforts are. For example, you can set out a community **work plan** that includes specific goals, tasks and timelines. This will help crystallize the purpose of the group.

Finally, **ensure there are channels for giving feedback** so that you know how you can change the process of decision making or understand why there may be points of

frustration or confusion with the process. Feedback tools can include anything from online or in person surveys or focus groups to informal discussions at meetings or events. You should also ensure that there is time for review and evaluation of strategies and approaches to engagement.

3. Patience: Change Takes Time

Change in communities takes time. There is no such thing as 'instant' community engagement. Residents need to develop the skills and confidence needed to support and advocate for change. It also takes time to foster commitment to supporting change in communities. Community engagement processes are ongoing and episodic.

As a result, it is very important **to celebrate small successes and the work that community members do** on an ongoing basis. It is especially important to identify and celebrate when the community does come together around issues.

4. Persistence and Determination
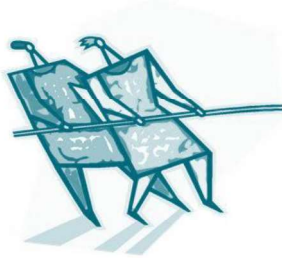
The success of community initiatives, projects and development is largely dependent on whether people stay committed to the work, because it *can* take a long time. In order for community engagement to be effective, the community needs to work together *over a long period of time*. Residents often do not have the time and commitment to make the changes they want to make or are only able to make them in a reasonable period of time.

Quick Tips...

- Tackle issues of real concern that people care about *and want to work on*
- Be consistent with efforts and don't let time lag (this may deflate efforts)
- Be clear about the limitations of the your efforts within the community in order to set realistic expectations
- Ensure that people are actively a part of the change rather than just token participants so that active organizers aren't limited to a handful of people
- Promote success and positive thinking every step of the way

5. Build Trust

The community also needs to trust those leading the process and feel as though they are committed to making change in the community. As an organizer, if you give the impression that you are not 100% committed by failing to respond to emails, attend meetings, follow up with people or tasks, the community will quickly lose trust in the process and in you as an organizer. The section on **"Principles of a Community Organizer"** goes over key principles that will help build trust in the work you do in the community.

Quick Tips...

- **Respect people's opinions** (even if you don't agree with them, you can use positive responses such as "that's really interesting" or "fair enough" or "I can understand how you feel that way")
- **Be consistent and reliable** (have a set time where people know they can reach you and always respond to people in a timely manner)
- **Establish rules for mutual respect and follow them** (take time to think about how you would like to be treated as a community member)
- **Lead by example** (showing that you practice a set of principles positively will inspire others to do the same)
- **Remember what matters to people and relay that to the community** (showing the community that you know what matters and that you care goes a long way)
- **Engage people based on their personal goals and interests** (open avenues of engagement to people based on what concerns them, and how they want to engage)
- **Make a point to thank people** (either when they share their opinions, come to events, or work on projects or activities)

6. Collective Decision Making

A central component of community engagement is embedding control in decision-making within the community. For community engagement to be successful, it is important to encourage members of the community to participate in determining local priorities, and creating goals for the communities that meet their needs, concerns and interests.

When communities do not feel as though they have a stake in the change that happens, they may not see decisions about local policies and the delivery of services as legitimate and credible.

But, when the majority of people feel heard and included in decision-making, there is ownership over the decision and a commitment to achieve the change desired. It empowers communities to take initiative, increases their investment in the community and develops a sense amongst community members that they have control over the direction of their community.

It is important to choose the appropriate methods or strategies to ensure that everyone has their say in decisions that affect the community as a whole. Some of the following methods can be employed to help bring everyone in a community on board.

Quick Tips…

- Holding community forums and meetings on identified issues (while identifying action-pieces at the end based on participant's suggestions)

- Inviting members to **democratic-based*** or **consensus-based*** working groups on specific initiatives

- Get feedback on proposed decisions from the community through either formal votes or informal discussions during meetings or gatherings

- Supply a "suggestion box" where appropriate

- Ensure that everyone's voices are heard (sometimes, a small portion of the community may express their voices louder than others. But this does not mean that other members' voices are less worthy or non-existent.)

- If you know of community members who have not expressed their suggestions for community decisions, invite them to give their opinions, as some people are less comfortable in doing so unless they are approached

- Provide an adequate amount of time for people's feedback (some people need more time than others to provide a response)

- Be accessible for receiving feedback

7. Building Capacity

It is very important that the majority of work to change the community be done by the community itself. The community should take ownership over making changes. However, oftentimes people do not have the skills, knowledge or experience they need in order to make changes happen.

One of the central roles of an organizer is to build capacity and harness experience available in the community in order to achieve objectives. You might need to hold workshops, offer skill building exercises, identify resources, and provide support in order to ensure that the actions are owned by community members. Building capacity creates and maintains sustainable communities.

Check out our guidebook on Developing Effective Partnerships!

8. Building Partnerships

For change to happen in communities, it is important to collaborate with others and involve many stakeholders – those that have a 'stake' in improving the community. This can and should include people from different sectors – organizations, residents, businesses and government staff. Different people can collaborate to discuss ideas, create plans and implement solutions to different problems.

While it is important to include a broad range of people in defining and solving problems, partnerships can be tricky to negotiate and understand. However, to be effective you need to have a clear sense of everyone's role and obligations in the work being done. When you partner with other organizations or individuals, you need to have a clear understanding of what they want out of the collaboration, the reason why they are interested in working with you and how you want to work together.

While partnerships can be very political and sensitive, they can also be extremely beneficial because they allow you to access resources, communities or experts that you otherwise may not have reached.

Examples of partnerships:
- Community agencies and non-profits
- Neighboring communities
- Community Associations
- Federal, provincial, or municipal agencies
- Businesses
- Colleges and Universities
- Recreational Clubs

Principles of a Community Organizer

"Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

This section discusses important principles for professional community organizers – those who work for an organization to perform outreach and develop engagement within the community. While being familiar with your community is the first step to community engagement and outreach, it is just as important for a community organizer to live by a number of principles that will allow you to effectively and genuinely organize. These five basic principles allow you to maintain a clear sense of your role in the community.

1. Embrace Culture

Scarborough (and Toronto in general) has one of the most diverse populations in the world. While we have welcomed and embraced multiculturalism in our policies, social isolation and exclusion is consistently identified as a pressing issue within immigrant and ethnic populations. It is important to recognize that many people in immigrant and ethnic communities are eager to get involved and develop social networks.

Learn about different cultural approaches to community & community involvement. As community workers, it is very important to understand that residents have different understandings of what community is and different ways of engaging with their communities. As a result, engagement and outreach strategies that work to engage certain communities may not work to engage others.

2. Ensure Professionalism

If you are a professional community organizer, it is important to be accessible to members of the community while ensuring legitimacy in what you do. When working in the community, **use tools like ID badges and business cards** to help build trust. Second, **maintain strong and strict boundaries** – recognize that you are not friends with residents, but that rather you are working for them. Finally, **recognize that your goals may not align with the community's goals**, and that you should reduce any biases in your work if this gets in the way of the community's mandate. In sum, you should practice your profession with integrity for what you do, and respect for the community you are working with.

3. Understand Your Relationship with Residents

Be protective and respectful of your relationships with residents. When working with communities, you need to constantly make judgment calls on who you want to bring into the community to work with them and what role you want them to play. You need to ensure that you respect your residents' views, approaches and private lives. Moreover, **do not attempt to solve the community's personal problems.** Your role is to listen to and provide residents support in the process of resolving their problems. Sometimes residents face challenging personal situations. It is not your responsibility to 'fix' what is wrong in their lives. Be empathetic and provide support when you can.

4. Live by Personal Values

Maintaining your values also helps legitimize effective community building. **Leading by example** is one value many community organizers hold in order to educate and support communities. **Knowing yourself and your biases** also helps to be open and honest in what you do. **Keep yourself in check** and by reflecting on what you do, avoid any action that may compromise your professionalism or leadership in communities. **Be open and respect differences** as you will be working with a variety of people, some whom may not agree with you and have a different approach to tackling situations. **Learn from the community and be responsive to their needs.** Community engagement is a two-way street and just because you are an organizer, it does not mean you are an expert on the community. Stay humble and ensure that you are learning from community members so you can ensure better knowledge of the community. Finally, actively **listen to the needs of community** in order to identify appropriate responses to meeting their needs and building engagement.

5. Be Engaged

Show you care and be genuine. In order to do community organizing effectively, you need to show that you care. You yourself need to be engaged – you need to be informed of what is going on in the community and you need to take steps to actively make positive changes in the community, just like you would if you were a member of that community yourself.

Case Studies

Lessons Learned

Below are some terrific examples of lessons learned from the *Community Engagement* team at the *Agincourt Community Services Association*. This team is comprised of staff who work on a variety of issues and target a diverse population in the Scarborough area.

1. Avoid "convenient engagement"

Though groups have a vested interest in engaging a particular community, it is always important to remember that in order to have any meaningful impact in what you do, you need to stay committed to engaging with the community even in the most inconvenient of times. Communities are easily able to identify when a group comes in to engage solely as a response to a specific incident or crisis that took place in the community, having consistent, long-term and meaningful engagement (even in times of stability) will build greater trust, and therefore greater engagement with community members.

> **Above all else, we have to build trust...**
>
> *Over the past summer, one of our communities was hit by a crisis. Whenever a crisis occurs, service providers flock to the community. During the summer, the service providers organized a BBQ and did a lot of outreach to get people to come and engage. However, as the weather worsened, the engagement work stopped. This had been repeated during the following summer, but service providers ended up losing the community's trust because they would only engage with them when it was most convenient.*
>
> *So, over the past few years, I worked on a consistent relationship with the community, earning their trust, and engaging with them even when there is no crisis at hand. The community is now more engaged, and more active than they were as a result of consistent and genuine engagement.*

2. Listen to the community first

As grassroots organizers and service providers, it sometimes becomes easy to get carried away with what we *think* the community needs, and what the community *actually* needs. Without performing a meaningful needs assessment, you may end up disengaging the community with what you have to offer. Be sure to ask community residents about what they want, and ask them if they would be interested in what your group could offer before you begin your mission.

Everybody wants community space! Right???

A few years ago, we noticed a group of Tamil senior men regularly playing board games in the back corner of our parking lot outside our building. It only made sense to us that to meet their needs, we could provide a space in the building where they could come and play their games in a safe and indoor environment. We gathered some funds and invited them with a space of their own to carry on with their daily activities as part of our community engagement strategy. We tried to structure their meetings and get them more engaged, for instance, take more action in their community, or participate in workshops.

However, the space didn't get used at all! They didn't want a space indoors; they didn't want a space to engage and interact with other community members; they didn't need our help at all! This group simply just wanted to play shuffle board in the parking lot! If we had known earlier, we would have made different choices in our engagement strategies. Maybe we could have gotten them more engaged, but we were going about it the wrong way.

3. Basic needs come before engagement

One of the reasons why it is difficult to engage with the some "hard-to-reach" groups is because some of them may be more interested in fulfilling their most basic needs before they can proceed with engaging in community initiatives. Whether you are trying to reach to newcomers who are busy settling into their new home, youth who are either focused with school work or occupied with social development in their early years, or low-income individuals and families who are more interested in finding food and affordable housing who will run into a few bumps ahead. Realizing the basic needs of individuals and incorporating those needs into your community engagement strategies will make for more meaningful interactions.

Talking finances at a food bank…

I am beginning to see clients for financial appointment at SCHC at 4100 Lawrence Ave. East. In order to outreach my program I decided to stand outside near the food bank line. The food bank days are by far the busiest days at SCHC, so I could talk to people while they are waiting for their food.

This food bank is well under-stocked and they usually run out of food before the end of the day. As people were waiting in line, I passed out my flyers, talked about government programs and credits. Only a few people seemed interested in my services and no one called to make an appointment.

I believe it was because of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. People needed to make sure they have food for the week. This was the only thing on their mind. Financial issues come after their family is fed.

4. For the unengaged, localized organizing works better

While organizing a rather large event in a central location is easier to organize and is more cost-effective than multiple local events, it may not be very inviting to those you would like to reach out to. Larger events outside a specific community tend to attract more engaged residents. Though these events are useful and efficient for some purposes, this does not tend to work for engaging community members who are not usually engaged in the area you are working on. It is recommend that to engage local residents, that groups organize their events within local communities.

We want youth! Please please come! Pretty please! Please! Come! COME!

Last year, we held a large forum just for youth in Scarborough to talk about systemic issues that matter to them and how they can address their issues with political representatives.

We outreached to all the local community agencies, the Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) centres, and the libraries. We found that that our outreach efforts were a waste of time since not a lot of youth who are connected to these bodies came. Instead, already-engaged youth in Scarborough ended up coming, and the unengaged (whom we wanted to get to come) didn't. After speaking to some folks who work with the ANCs, we learned that most youth in their communities just weren't ready to leave their local communities (and even their homes) to attend an event beyond their comfort zone. The groups of youth we were interested in engaging did not find value in our large event, and thought that these sort of events were intimidating and didn't address any of their needs. If we had organized a few smaller events more local to youth, then perhaps some may have been more interested in attending.

5. Judgmental and Confrontational Reactions are Uninviting

No matter the subject matter, no matter the views shared, and no matter the purpose of your engagement, it is extremely important to approach community members with the outmost respect and dignity, the same way you would want others to treat you. A large part of community engagement work is to provide residents and groups with a safe space to share their thoughts without judgment. When organizing an event, make sure that all the rules of respect are covered not just for organizers, but for participants as well.

It's not about what "we" want, it's about listening and working with the community to address issues collectively.

A group of Muslim women were invited to a parenting workshop hosted by a partnering project of ours. This workshop went over the needs of teenagers and the tensions that exist between what they parents want them to dress, how teenagers want to dress. Some of these women had concerns and were expressing their frustrations on the subject matter of their children's attire. Unfortunately, the facilitator, as well as some more liberal Muslim women who came as participants weren't very open to hearing the concerns of this particular group and some people even went so far as to ridicule their thoughts and concerns.

Needless to say, the purpose of this workshop (which was to discuss the issues and develop ways to address existing tensions between parents and their children) was not met. Instead, a few of the women left even more frustrated, and perhaps even more isolated.

In hindsight, we should have set ground rules for both the facilitator and the participants of the workshop on how to treat others and respect any idea presented, as well as acknowledge that while we may not agree with each other's point of view, this workshop will be an open and safe place to share

6. A little dedicated commitment goes a long way

In some cases, it may not take a lot of effort to engage the community, but rather a lot of time instead. In order to continue to build trust, it is important to let community members know that you are dedicated and there to genuinely help the community, rather than meet a project mandate.

Just sitting there showed that I was committed and could be trusted…

When I first started working in a priority neighbourhood, I decided to go to the lobby of a particular hard-to-reach building in the area. I would go there every day, and just sit in the lobby, greeting people as they entered or left the building. At first, residents would just say hello to me, but after a few weeks, people would start asking me who I was. After a month or so, people really got engaged in the dialogue and got engaged in whichever initiative I was engaging them for.

7. Respond to the needs of the community as a way to engage

Sometimes, the simplest commitment through community engagement can be overlooked. By simply asking the community what they are interested in and what they would like to see happen in the community, groups and individuals are given a wide range of how they can respond adequately to engage the community. Community needs can be as simple as needing more lighting on a particular street, to needing a space to practice English conversation skills. These simple needs are not only easy to respond to (given adequate time, dedication, and sometimes resources), but also lay a strong foundation to building engagement within the community in a meaningful way.

> *We worked on things people could relate to...*
>
> *When we wanted to engage Newcomers, we at first tried to have a newcomer focus group. Only 3 people showed up. We then used that opportunity to ask them what newcomers needed in the community, their response was that they needed an English Conversation Circle. As a result, ANC got a volunteer and organized an English Circle and over 40 women showed up. The lesson we learned was that the best way to engage is through concrete tangible things that people can relate to and that people need...*

8. Think about your language

They way you communicate information is a pillar to effective community engagement. Depending on your personal biases, or the approach you or your organization takes, the language used can be engaging for one group, but not as engaging for another. Consider a community group going to give a workshop on worker's rights. Which sentence would be more meaningful to residents?

A) "*Precarious* work has increased in this region over the last 10 years"
B) "*Short-term and contract jobs* have increased in this region over the last 10 years"

In your approach to engagement, think critically about the kinds of words you use, and how you chose to express the message. If you don't know your audience before hand, be creative and go with the flow of the participants!

Teaching Financial Literacy to a Beginner English Class…

During *Credit Education Week*, I was booked to facilitate three financial workshops all over Scarborough to teach people about financial literacy and money management. These workshops used a lot of large financial **jargons***
which leaves many participants yawning and doodling.

Not knowing that I was giving a workshop to a beginner English speaking class, I slowly shifted the words I used half-way though my presentation. I tried to make the presentations more colourful and simple. I began using simpler words to convey the same message, like "money", "income", "savings" and "bills". I didn't touch the PowerPoint presentation for the rest of the class. It was a lot of fun and though I wasn't able to fully explain how to set up a budget, we were able to have a really great talk about money saving techniques.

These cases are just a few of many examples of what can be done to optimize your engagement and outreach techniques.

Glossary

Consensus-based decision making: Consensus-based decision making takes place when every member of the group agrees to the proposed decision. This can happen through negotiations, expanding the proposal, or limiting the proposal, in order to get everyone on board with the decision.

Democratic-based decision making: Democratic-based decision making takes place when every member of a group has one vote and the proposed outcome with the most votes proceeds as the final decision.

Grassroots: Grassroots initiatives are initiatives created and driven at the local level. The term itself (i.e. the roots of grass") implies that these initiatives start from the ground, grow naturally or organically, and grow upwards, perhaps even affecting top-level initiatives as well.

Jargon: Jargon words are special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others who are not in the profession to understand.

Tokenism: Tokenism is the practice of obligatory gestures made to people based on their gender, income, or minority status attempt to create an inclusionary initiative or process. However, tokenism only creates the illusion of inclusion as it assumes that any interaction with normally excluded groups would satisfy their process. It does not necessarily allow these groups to participate in a process and make a difference.

Stakeholders: Stakeholders are any persons, groups, agencies, or public or private organizations who may be impacted by a specific process, event, trend, community, or initiative.