

Contact Tracing: A Community Engagement Checklist for Health Departments

Health departments often collaborate with other organizations to improve the health and well-being of their community. This collaboration can increase acceptance and trust of health department activities such as contact tracing in a community. Keep these tips in mind when working with community organizations on contact tracing.

✓ Review the [key principles of community engagement](#).

- 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 their wellbeing.
- Community engagement efforts can increase health equity, promote social connection, strengthen partnerships, and build trusting relationships with the community.

✓ Determine the purpose and goals of working with community partners.

- Work with community partners to develop contact tracing priorities and strategies. While reviewing the [contact tracing process](#), think about key areas where community engagement is most needed and could be effective in supporting response efforts. Consider the community's cultures and languages when planning community outreach.
 - » Is the goal to find contacts who are difficult to reach in a local area with a high number of cases?
 - » Is there a need to focus on reaching contacts with high potential for community spread?
 - » What is the most effective way to build community awareness and acceptance of the contact tracing process?

✓ Build relationships and [work together](#) with community partners.

- Health departments should meet with community partners to identify resources and share concerns related to COVID-19. Building community partnerships may require a dedicated support person or team with an awareness of local COVID-19 conditions and experience in community organizing. A [Communities of Practice](#) model may be appropriate when facilitating meetings between community partners.
- **Spotlight: Using a Community of Practice (CoP) to improve contact tracing and communications in Virginia.** In Richmond, Virginia, Hispanic and Latinx individuals represent only 6% of the population but account for 32% of COVID-19 cases and 30% of COVID-19 related hospitalizations. The Richmond (RCHD) and Chesterfield (CCHD) County health districts collaborated with a CDC team of 6 bicultural and bilingual Hispanic/Latinx individuals to strategize a local response. The RCHD and CCHD staff identified limitations in cross-coordination between the health districts and community partners regarding their COVID-19 response efforts. As a result, the CDC staff identified the CoP as a strategy to leverage community resources, share best practices, and collaboratively create solutions to meet COVID-19 needs in Richmond and Chesterfield. The CoP workshop facilitated discussions



regarding the lack of bilingual/bicultural staff in both RCHD and CCHD required for effective communication, contact tracing, and outreach efforts in the Hispanic/Latinx community.

Take-away: The RCHD hired more bilingual and bicultural staff from Hispanic/Latinx communities to improve the contact tracing and communication efforts in Richmond and Chesterfield as a result of the CoP workshop.

- True community engagement seeks to foster the empowerment of people so they can make life decisions. This takes time and sometimes isn't feasible in a crisis, however, there are immediate steps health departments and community representatives can take to build a foundation towards empowerment. Other key questions to consider:
 - » Do health department staff understand the community's perceptions of illness, methods of disease prevention and experiences with the health care system?
 - » How can public health workers use plain language to explain case interviews, contact tracing, and COVID-19 testing to community members?
 - » What are the challenges to contact tracing for deeply affected communities?
 - » What barriers do community members face in accessing viral tests?
 - » What organizations, agencies, and individuals do the community trust?

✓ Ask community members to identify barriers to contact tracing and develop potential solutions.

- Common concerns about contact tracing include:
 - » Privacy and confidentiality of health and personal information
 - » [Stigma and discrimination](#) if exposed or tested positive to COVID-19
 - » Being fired, laid off from work or not being paid while complying with self-quarantine
 - » Not being able to self-isolate or self-quarantine because of housing that makes preventing transmission difficult
- Identify roadblocks to successfully working with a target population.
 - » Why is there reluctance to engage in contact tracing?
 - » How can public health workers build trust and educate the community about the value and impact of contact tracing?

✓ Develop a communications strategy so that community partners can convey clear, consistent messaging about contact tracing to the public.

- Refer community partners to the [CDC Interim COVID-19 Contact Tracing Communications Toolkit](#) for sample talking points, public service announcements, and other resources.
- Help community partners identify the best use of social media and outlets like newsletters, signs, newspapers, radio and other media to convey messages about what contact tracing is and how it works.
- Assess whether bilingual health department staff and translation/interpretation services are needed to ensure messages and materials are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Additional resources

ASTDR Principles of Community Engagement Second Edition.

<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/>

CDC Interim COVID-19 Communications Toolkit for Health Departments (available in English and Spanish)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing-comms.html>

CDC Contact Tracing Resources

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/open-america/contact-tracing-resources.html>

CDC Contact Tracing Steps Infographic

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/Contact-Tracing-Infographic-FINAL.pdf>

CDC Health Equity: Promoting Fair Access to Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/index.html>

CDC Guidance for Health Departments about COVID-19 Testing in the Community

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/open-america/testing.html/>

CDC Reaching At-Risk Populations in an Emergency

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/workbook/index.asp>