

# Engaging Community-Based Organizations to Be Vaccination Partners

[Community engagement](#) is the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting their well-being. Authentic, transparent, and inclusive engagement improves participation while building trust.

Community engagement can be seen as a [continuum of community involvement](#), from outreach to consultation, involvement, collaboration, and shared leadership. Community engagement must be tailored and should recognize and respect the diversity of the community.

## Tips for Engaging Community-Based Organizations

- **Build relationships.** Identify at least 2–3 community leaders who could provide insight on the communities you want to engage.
  - » Community leaders could include well-known and trusted community members; faith-based leaders; racial, ethnic, and cultural group leaders; community-based organization leaders, and social and civic organization leaders.
  - » The mayor's office, county executive office, or public health department could help identify community leaders.
- **Generate community buy-in.** Partner with trusted community leaders to make sure you have support from the community and within your own organization to collaborate with a community-based organization as a vaccination partner.
- **Define your purpose.** Be clear about the purposes or goals of the engagement effort and the populations and/or communities you want to engage as vaccination partners.
- **Identify and understand community perceptions.** Ask leaders about the community's culture, norms, values, social networks, political and power structures, economic conditions, demographic trends, history, and experience with efforts by outside groups to engage the community in various programs. Identify community perceptions of those initiating the engagement activities as well as any perceptions of area government or healthcare systems. Use this community feedback to inform your outreach activities.
- **Develop a communication strategy.** Share culturally and linguistically responsive information about the vaccination program with the community. Do so early and in a credible way. Continue to communicate frequently during and after the project.
  - » A clear communication strategy will allow community partners to convey clear, consistent messaging to the community. Be sure to use [plain language](#) and information that is accessible.
  - » Provide information that [empowers people](#) to make their own decisions.
- **Share information in multiple formats.** High-level engagement activities include community forums and hotlines. Other formats include newsletters, signs in public places, newspapers, media that reach different segments of the population, and social media.
- **Be culturally responsive** when considering the products and channels that are being used to communicate messages.
- **Appropriately adapt the visuals and content**, in addition to the words, when creating materials for people who do not speak English.
- **Involve the community.** Actively involve the community in the planning, design, and implementation of vaccination programs, as well as in the communication about these programs. An advisory group or [community of practice](#) model may be an effective way to include communities in meaningful decision-making.
- **Humility and flexibility are key.** You may need to adapt the vision for the vaccination program and make adjustments to best serve the community. Build in points for reflection to decide whether your original plan might need to change, or if implementation of the plan is not working as anticipated.
- **Acknowledge systemic health and social inequities.** There may be long-standing discrimination and systemic health and social inequities, including healthcare access and utilization, occupation, educational level, income and wealth gaps, and housing issues, that you cannot change and are out of your control. Being aware of these issues can help you adapt and adjust.
- **Foster sustainability of the community partnership.** Engage community members and leaders at every stage of the process, including to share the results and outcome of the vaccination program.
- **Be intentional.** Make sure to plan with the intent to leave the community stronger and healthier than when the partnership began.

## Additional Resources and References

CDC | [For Community-Based Organizations](#)

American Psychological Association | [Building Vaccine Confidence Through Community Engagement](#)

The Urban Institute | [Community Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond](#)



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention