



BECOME
seedling social change



THE ANNIE E. CASEY
FOUNDATION

A stylized illustration of three hands reaching upwards. The hands are rendered in various colors: one is light blue, one is dark red, and one is yellow. They are set against a background of light blue and pinkish-purple geometric shapes.

Shared Vision, Shared Future: Community Engagement in Action

Submitted by BECOME to the
Annie E. Casey Foundation

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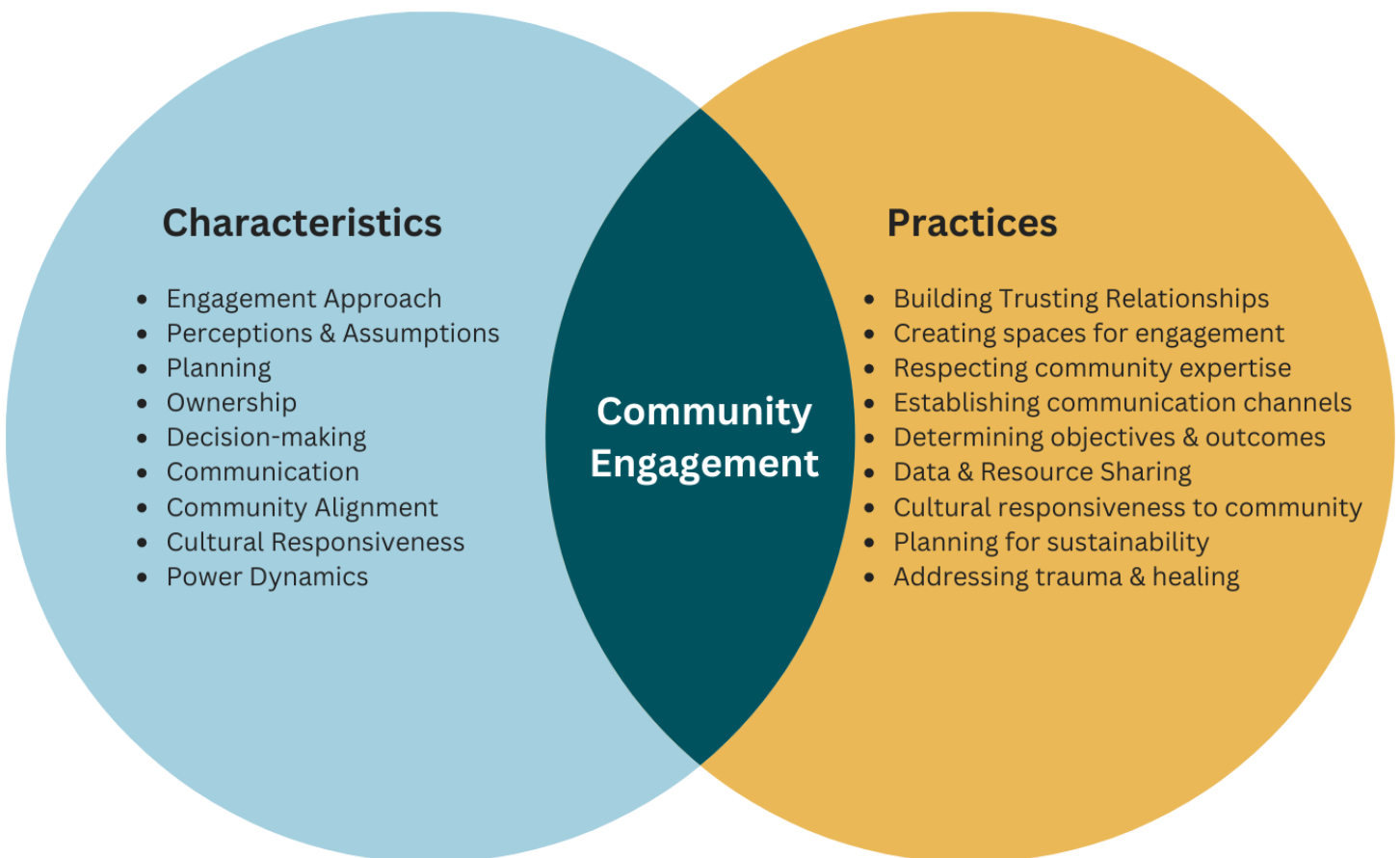
Acknowledgement

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Introduction

As many cultural workers, nonprofits, and justice advocates can attest, engaging communities is oftentimes difficult and challenging work. True community engagement is a complex and ongoing process that requires a commitment to building trust with folks who likely have different lived experiences. However, when engagement is seen as a means to an end to community development, outside collaborators run the risk of perpetuating extractive and biased practices, continuing cycles of harm, and fueling deep-seated feelings of distrust, frustration, and hostility. The intention for this tool is to provide a path towards meaningful community engagement. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, BECOME has developed this rubric to support communities and partners who wish to move into deeper relationships with the communities they serve and support. This rubric also brings together voices and perspectives from residents, community leaders, nonprofit staff, community advocates, and people engaged in philanthropy. Our hope is that this resource will spark conversations around what authentic and sustainable community engagement and transformation can look like. Below is an overview of the rubric.



How to Use this Tool

This rubric is not designed to be a list of prescriptive, definitive solutions to community engagement. Approaches will likely vary across communities according to cultures and contexts. If there are practices that you and your team have developed over time that allow you to deepen your relationship and solidarity with community members affected by systemic inequities, we encourage you to honor those and take from this rubric what resonates. Below are a few ways your team can use this rubric to deepen engagement.

DREAM IT

Gather a representative team to host a visioning session.

Visioning Session Prompt

The year is 2033 and the initiative has succeeded in what it has set out to do. How does the community look? Feel? What aspects have changed over the course of 10 years?

Take 10-15 minutes to individually journal before coming back together to share your visions with each other. Create a collective vision statement that everyone in the initiative can refer back to.

Review the rubric and consider the following question:

Which practices and characteristics can help us achieve and embody this vision?

SCHEME IT

Invite a representative team of folks involved in the initiative to better understand intentions.

Break out into affinity groups and choose 2-3 reflection questions to discuss.

Come back together to share and create a responsive engagement plan (who, what, when) that the team can check in and adjust as needed

TEAM IT

Gather a representative team to share stories of community engagement that have occurred during the initiative. Review the rubric and consider the following questions:

What about the engagement(s) went well? What characteristics or practices from the rubric may have improved this engagement experience?

Definitions

We believe that words have the power to shape the way we frame our ideas and beliefs, which in turn inform how we view and engage with ourselves and each other. To bring to life the importance of shared language and to create collective understanding, we have created a glossary of terms that are used throughout this document. These terms have grounded our thinking and framework around relationship building and engagement. We acknowledge that these are our current working definitions and leave space for those using this rubric to adjust and replace as needed.

Community Engagement: Community engagement is based on the belief that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their neighborhood should have a meaningful role in the decision making related to the issue. Through engagement and productive partnerships, residents can be empowered to develop future visions and sustainability of their communities.

Agency: groups and individuals who want to engage and develop with communities that either reside outside of these communities or are considered outsiders.

Community: a group of people living together or in close proximity within a larger society (place-based) or a group of people who are connected through identity, culture, beliefs or other distinguishing characteristics (identity-based).

Community Engagement: Based on the belief that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their neighborhood should have a meaningful role in the decision making related to the issue. Through engagement and productive partnerships, residents are supported and resourced to develop future visions and sustainability of their communities.

Culture: Refers to the knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, norms, attitudes, notions of time, roles, concepts of the universe, and material objects embraced by a particular group of people.

Cultural Humility: sometimes referred to as “freedom from pride and arrogance,” which requires those involved (especially those not directly affected by the initiative) to embrace empathy and respect toward others’ cultural background and experiences.

Cultural Relevance: Each community has its own unique culture that determines how people communicate, how meaning is created and how power is defined and distributed. Culture also determines how people participate in partnerships and understand ideas like trust and social change. Cultural relevance is critical for effective community engagement because it builds the foundation for ongoing, community-specific ongoing participation for everyone involved.

Community Transformation: For BECOME, we discuss fundamental change through the innovative approach to community transformation called Culturally Responsive Community Development (CRCDD). We believe that the community has the answers it needs to solve their problems. By building relationships with community members, partners work on three levels: community/resident groups, institutions, and policy makers. We share our resources and knowledge for the long-term until the community’s vision is fully realized. All partners are encouraged to share resources and perspectives. (See Appendix B).

Partners: Groups and individuals dedicated to real change within the community who center suggestions and solutions from community, decenter themselves and provide resources with the goal of helping communities sustain their efforts.

Reflection Questions

Understanding Who & Why

- Think about your social position/identities (think socioeconomic background, race/ethnicity, gender, educational status, etc.). How might these identities and life experiences shape how you approach residents and engagement?
- What is the driving force behind decisions within the initiative? Are the expressed needs of community members embedded into initiative goals and outcomes?
- Who is involved in the initiative and why? Are these participants approved or recommended by community residents?

Notes:

Gauging Engagement

Questions for community residents

- Are trust and open communication felt among all groups and individuals?
- Does the initiative facilitate comfortable levels of trust and open communication?
- Is the community at large actively participating in the initiative? Do you consider this initiative to be “inside out” or “outside-in” in terms of the ownership and direction of the initiative?
- Does the initiative reflect needs and issues identified by your community?
- How would you describe your relationship with your partner? Do you feel like the partner understands the culture and context of your community?

Notes:

Questions for non-residents

- Are trust and open communication felt among all groups and individuals?
- How would you describe your/your organization’s relationship with residents?
- In what ways are you approaching this work with cultural humility? What assumptions and expectations are you holding about this neighborhood and its residents?
- How are you/your organization following up with residents? Do they understand exactly how their insights will inform the initiative? Is there room for their revisions and feedback before dissemination?
- Is there enough space within the initiative to shift when needed?

Notes:

Co-Building/Co-Developing the Future

- What is the shared vision for community transformation?
- In what ways have the capacities of the community expanded due to the efforts of the initiative?
- What feedback loops are in place to ensure community voices are being centered?
- What are partners’ roles in creating/supporting infrastructure for community to continue the work, or to take on new initiatives?
- What processes and structures are in place to promote the viability and sustainability of the initiative? How do these structures aid in the eventual liberation of folks directly affected?

Notes:

Community Engagement Rubric

Characteristics: traits to recognize real community engagement (or its absence)

	Emerging	Developing	Transforming
Engagement Approach	May be extractive in nature with few opportunities for community input.	Intentional and collaborative with ample of opportunities for community input	Innovative, synergistic and adaptable. Everyone understands that change cannot occur without deep and ongoing involvement of community members.
Perceptions & Assumptions	Community is unaware of the initiative's purpose and goals Space may be created to address assumptions held by both non-residents and the community	Community has a working understanding of the initiative's purpose and goals Assumptions and concerns coming from community residents directly involved/impacted are actively addressed	Everyone involved has a clear and strong understanding of the initiative's purpose and goals Partners have earned the trust of community residents both those involved and those directly impacted.
Plan	Inflexible scope, timeline and outcomes based on assumptions about the community	Semi-flexible plan and timeline based on community feedback	Fully responsive plan, timeline and roles that center real-time shifts and individual and collective capacities
	Emerging	Developing	Transforming
Ownership	Agency representatives have complete ownership of resources and data	Partners and community members share ownership of resources and data	Community has complete ownership of resources and data.
Decision-Making	Community members may not be seen as important decision-makers in the development and planning stage	Community members are included in some decision-making processes	Community members and leaders are seen as vital to the success of the initiative and are the primary decision-makers
Communications	Mostly transactional communication from the agency to the community	Accessible system that promotes open communication	Responsive system that promotes honest, transparent and constructive communication

Emerging**Developing****Transforming**

Alignment with Community Needs	Limited to no alignment or understanding of the community context and needs	Partial or majority alignment of the needs and cultures of the community	Community drives initiative based on identified needs
Cultural responsiveness	Agency representatives may acknowledge the cultural norms and practices of the community	Partners develop an understanding of cultural norms and practices within the community, and incorporate them into the initiative	Cultural norms and practices are celebrated and central to activities, messaging and outcomes
Power Dynamics	Potentially harmful dynamics may not be acknowledged	Difficult conversations may occur when conflict arises (i.e., power dynamics, language, assumptions, exclusionary practices, structural racism, enacting harm)	Harmful power dynamics are acknowledged and thoroughly addressed by all groups involved

Which characteristics resonate with you the most?

Practices: strategies and activities that engage communities with an emphasis on learning through practice as partners move closer to transformative engagement.

	Emerging	Developing	Transforming
Building Trusting Relationships	Agencies and community members begin to learn about each other's interests, needs, communication styles and culture.	Everyone begins to feel comfortable being vulnerable and sharing their experiences with each other.	Relationships of care are established beyond the goals and purpose of the initiative.
Creating spaces for community engagement	<p>Agencies may not see a need to create a safe space for collaboration and engagement.</p> <p>Location May not be accessible to community members</p> <p>Comfortability Residents may not feel comfortable participating, sharing their experiences, or voicing their opinions during decision-making processes.</p>	<p>Understand the need for and cultivate safe spaces to provide opportunities for everyone present to express themselves. A few ways this can be done are by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting intentions for the gathering - Creating group norms and shared language - Unpacking assumptions - Sharing personal lived experiences - Encouraging folks to share their opinions - Identifying areas of commonality <p>Location Residents are asked to provide suggestions on accessible locations and time preferences.</p> <p>Comfortability Residents begin to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with partners and fellow community members.</p>	<p>Understand and cultivate brave spaces that strongly encourage active participation from everyone present. A few ways this can be done include examples in the previous column, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allowing people to show up as their full, authentic selves free from judgment or retaliation - Encouraging disagreement and constructive feedback - Addressing privilege and power dynamics - Co-creating systems of accountability <p>Location Residents determine the appropriate meeting place and time.</p> <p>Comfortability Everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences with others in the initiative.</p>
Respecting local expertise	Limited effort is made to solicit community input when solution(s) prove ineffective or when roadblocks emerge.	<p>Co-identify new community leaders, groups and individuals to participate in the initiative beyond those previously engaged.</p> <p>Community members are primarily seen as subject matter experts in advisory roles and are compensated for their time and involvement.</p>	<p>Pour ample support and resources into community-led initiatives and activities.</p> <p>Multiple pathways to diverse community leadership are created.</p> <p>Community residents are seen as the primary experts in the initiative</p>

	Emerging	Developing	Transforming
Establishing communication channels	Communicate with residents when organizing a meeting; little to no follow up with participants.	Partner(s) lead communication between all groups involved. Structured but flexible approach to communication. Feedback loops may be incorporated.	Partner(s) support initiative in establishing and/or maintaining the community's own communication system that reaches diverse audiences on various platforms
Determining objectives and outcomes	Rigid; based on assumed community needs with little to no input from residents. Residents do not create indicators of success	Semi-flexible; informed by expressed community needs with input from residents. Co-created indicators of success	Adaptive; rooted in community needs and dreams. Community creates indicators of success
Data & Resource Sharing	Residents does not own data or resources Materials written and disseminated without community members in mind. Published materials exist in limited formats (i.e., report).	Co-owned data and resources; some data is housed within participating community groups/ organizations Materials written and disseminated with community members in mind. Published materials exist in a few formats.	Residents own and house data and resources within the community Multi-formatted materials written and disseminated with informing community members as the primary goal.
Cultural responsiveness to community	Slowly become aware of any assumptions and biases held about the community and its residents. Begin self-reflection practice Read stories, news and other documents to better understand the historical and current context of the community before rolling out the initiative	Begin challenging assumptions and biases about the community and its residents Make time for consistent self-reflection practice Partners participate in and support cultural, artistic and educational events occurring within the community.	Actively and intentionally challenge assumptions and biases by staying engaged, learning/ unlearning, and taking on a supportive role in community initiatives Cultural humility is present, and self-reflection is a regular and embedded practice

Emerging

Developing

Transforming

Planning for sustainability

Little to no planning beyond short-term goals

Discussions begin around resident capacities and long-term funding needs. Some transferring of ownership occurs.

Full decision making and ownership belongs to the community

Addressing Healing and trauma

Agencies are not aware of trauma-informed engagement practices, and/or do not have the capacity to enact them.

Partner(s) listen to community needs and incorporate trauma-informed practices and opportunities for healing

Restorative healing practices and processes are embedded into initiatives to actively address individual and collective trauma

Which practices should be addressed moving forward?

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Our Community Transformation Approach

Just as there is an innate ability inside of the caterpillar to know how to transform into a beautiful butterfly, we believe that individuals have the answers to transform their communities – and by extension, the broader society – to become socially cohesive, physically healthy, emotionally intelligent, and financially stable.

Our revolutionary approach to community transformation is called Culturally Responsive Community Development (CRCD). We believe the community has the answers to solve the community’s problems. By building relationships with community members, we are able to work on three levels –community/resident groups (e.g., block clubs), institutions (e.g., schools, churches, community centers, hospitals, police), and decision makers (e.g., alderman, mayor, state reps). Through this model, we concentrate all of our services in a neighborhood and partner with them for the long-term until their vision of a thriving community is realized.

Steps to CRCD

After receiving an invitation to work with or within a specific organization or community, we begin to engage with the community by implementing the following steps:

