**Logo

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Working in and with Communities**

# Topic

To succeed in tobacco control advocacy work, projects and coalitions need the involvement of local populations and community groups. To do this, projects must know where to find these populations, learn about cultural norms for interacting, and establish relationships with gatekeepers and thought leaders to gain access and legitimacy in the community. While there may be no single activity to plan or report on this, it’s an essential component to all planned and unplanned work.

**Terminology**

* Community Engagement: The practice of making space for and reaching out to local groups and populations in order learn from their priorities, views and experiences and work with them as partners on community mobilization efforts
* Cultural Humility: Willingness to be open to beliefs and values that differ from yours; entering spaces as a listener and ongoing learner rather than the expert; seeking out and making space for diverse perspectives and solutions
* Gatekeeper: A source known and trusted by the community who may provide you with acceptability and access (permissions, introductions, buy in) for entering and engaging with the community. Start with organizations that work in or serve the population of interest and then ask who else you should talk to
* Inequity: Unfair and unequal distribution of or access to health and social benefits (e.g., income, education, housing, etc.) stemming from the systemic disadvantage of certain social groups compared to other groups with whom they coexist. (National Institutes of Health)
* Thought Leader: An influential source who can provide access to or knowledge about a specific community or population. Although they may not serve in any official capacity (like a city council member), they are trusted by the community and exert informal power and influence
* Norm: A standard or pattern of social behavior that is typical or expected of a particular population. Commonly held beliefs and values that govern the behavior of a specific group. (Oxford Dictionary)
* Participatory: A word that indicates activities that are conducted *with* instead of *for* or *to* communities. It means that priority populations have a substantive role in developing, carrying out, and making sense of the intervention or evaluation activity—where they have input and ownership into the results.
* Priority Populations: Historically marginalized communities that typically suffer from social and health inequities and disproportionate targeting by the tobacco industry. Besides communities of color, these populations also include lower income strata, blue and pink collar workers, the LGBTQ, rural residents and youth
* Social Hierarchy: System of social organization in which some individuals enjoy a higher social status than others. When approaching communities, this often plays out where it is important to meet and gain permission from their leader before proceeding to talk with others (for example, on Tribal lands it’s important to approach the chief or council of elders first). There may be other hierarchies to be aware of as well such as gender, age, occupation, education, etc.

# Uses of Evaluation

Evaluation can play a crucial role in helping your project understand and work with local communities. Whether you need to follow up with a particular segment of the population as a result of public opinion findings OR whether you already planned to enter or approach a new community, exploring the appropriate manner for approaching and interacting with ethnic, religious, or other affiliated populations can save you a whole lot of trouble you might otherwise step into without knowing the cultural cues and norms. One size definitely does NOT fit all when it comes to unspoken rules of etiquette. So even if it’s not already in your work plan, save your project a lot of wasted time by talking to a few cultural guides who can share insights about the community and maybe even give you access to enter it.

**Key Informant Interviews** with thought leaders or gatekeepers of populations of interest can be used to:

1. Learn where to find the population
2. Identify other important thought leaders or gatekeepers
3. Learn about community priorities and issues of interest
4. Find out how best to approach the community; learn cultural protocols and norms
5. Get strategies for partnering with community groups and organizations
6. Find out what beliefs and conditions might explain public opinion results from this particular population (which differed from the general population)

Measures

* Gathering places, access points where the community may be found
* Connections with/access to key players in the community
* How to make or obtain introductions
* Community norms about government, family, environment, health, and collective or individual rights
* Social hierarchies to be aware of (age, gender, occupation, education, etc.)
* Cultural cues to watch for, protocols to follow, missteps to avoid
* Community’s relationship with tobacco

**Focus Groups** with members of a particular population are used to:

1. Learn about community norms and priorities and understand the rationale behind common beliefs or behaviors
2. Listen to needs, desires and suggestions of the community
3. Get ideas for how to recruit and involve this community in your efforts and activities
4. Ensure that educational and outreach materials are culturally appropriate for audiences
5. Assess which languages, literacy levels, and formats materials are needed in
6. Ask about the best way to share information with the community

Measures

* Beliefs, preferences, expectations for the way things are done
* Community concerns, priorities
* Tie-ins between activities and community issues and concerns
* Motivations, community groups
* Identification/clarity/comprehension of key messages
* Appeal of design/messages, formats
* Test text and data literacy levels
* Language, format preferences
* Test translation accuracy

**Cultural Competence Assessments** are useful for projects or coalitions to use to examine their gaps and individual and collective biases in order to:

1. Encourage individual and organizational self-assessment and cultural humility/responsiveness
2. Promote continual cultural education
3. Identify how to improve/widen inclusivity
4. Assess readiness and capability to tailor approaches and materials to relevant populations

Measures

* Knowledge of other identity groups (priority populations) and their beliefs and norms
* Personal/organizational biases when dealing with other groups
* Organizational representation/diversity/equity/inclusiveness
* Whose beliefs/views are included/missing?
* Gaps in materials/services needed by audiences
* Participatory planning, decision making, data collection, analysis and sensemaking
* Reciprocity, equity

**A word about Participatory Activities**

Instead of just extracting information from historically disadvantaged communities, working **alongside** members of a population in all the phases of the activity ⎯ from planning and conducting to sense-making and reporting ⎯ shares the power and the responsibility of the effort, and hopefully increases the potential of the activity’s success.

Partnering with members of a particular community on developing and conducting evaluation activities enhances the skill sets with the cross pollination of ideas and experiences. Tactics are more likely to work effectively when shaped by the knowledge and experience of those from the community of interest. Collaboration creates buy-in among those you hope to mobilize.

Evaluation activities such as Photovoice, CX priority-setting, or Data Parties (participatory sense-making of evaluation results) are particularly well-suited to be inclusive. Talking about which approaches would be the best fit for the population OR asking for interpretation of what happened and why can save projects a great deal of time and effort that might otherwise be wasted without insights from community members.