

STEP 2: Identify and Engage Stakeholders as Partners

The health status of community residents is not the sole responsibility of providers of health services. While providers may bear responsibility for leading community health improvement efforts, their success hinges on their ability to establish and maintain effective partnerships throughout the county or region. The responsible organizations need to identify and work with all entities that influence community health—from other government agencies to businesses to not-for-profit organizations to the general public. Initiatives should begin with a commitment to collaboration among diverse constituencies so that everyone feels a sense of ownership in the plan. By working with partners, initiatives can be developed to address such social determinants as housing, transportation and education that are critical to creating a healthy environment.

TIPS

#1: *There is strength in numbers—community input does not burden, but strengthens, the planning process. Community partners can:*

- Advocate for the goals and objectives of the plan in the community and recruit other partners;
- Contribute particular skills and talents; and
- Help monitor progress and achieve objectives.

#2: *Be inclusive, not exclusive (Don't invite just your friends!).*

- Strive for broad representation, and regularly assess gaps.
- Identify individuals and organizations that look at problems and solutions differently.
- Look for partners who have a stake in healthy communities, will contribute to the process and help achieve objectives.

#3: *Create and define useful roles for partners by:*

- Confirming commitments in writing where possible;
- Giving credit where credit is due; and
- Accepting that some partners will have different levels of commitment.

#4: *Don't just meet for the sake of meeting.*

- Be clear about the purpose and desired results of meetings.
- Choose an effective facilitator (not always the chair).
- Show respect for other people's time.

- Plan the meeting from the participants' perspective.

#5: *Nobody likes to be a rubber stamp.*

- Provide a continual feedback mechanism and consider all feedback received.
- Report to partners about how comments were addressed.
- Give people a voice before priorities are set.
- Ensure that groups have options and understand their implications before making big decisions.
- Strive to understand all parties' concerns and perspectives.
- Allow time for meaningful discussion.
- Establish ground rules that are fair to all.
- Establish partners' sense of ownership of the process.

#6: *Find creative and flexible ways to engage partners and community members by:*

- Considering rotating meeting places and times to accommodate different schedules and give participants a chance to see other communities;
- Offering meeting options that accommodate different preferences and levels of comfort with groups, such as informal discussions, conference calls, anonymous surveys, provider forums, focus groups, independent work groups, and kick-off events or small breakout groups; and using electronic communications, listservs, and websites, when possible.

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Action Checklist:

- Define target audiences
- Identify key individuals and organizations
- Design strategies for engaging partners
- Identify roles for partners and assign responsibilities
- Develop a communication vehicle to highlight partner activities
- Establish formal partnership agreements where appropriate
- Reassess and evaluate partner involvement and satisfaction

Notes: