



## Principles of Community Engagement

Principles of Community Engagement (CDC, 1997) represents the first time that the relevant theory and practical experience of community engagement has been synthesized and presented as practical principles for this important work. It defines key concepts and insights from the literature that support and influence the activities of community engagement. This publication, available online at [www.cdc.gov/phppo/pce](http://www.cdc.gov/phppo/pce), sets the standard and continues to be used nationally and internationally.

*Principles of Community Engagement* provides a science base and practical guidelines for engaging the public in community decision-making and action for health promotion, health protection, and disease prevention. These guidelines can help public health professionals and community leaders improve communication, promote common understanding, and strengthen coordination, collaboration, and partnership efforts among themselves and community members and institutions.

Key principles forming the core of the document hold true across public health disciplines regardless of the initiating organizations:

- Be clear about the purposes or goals of the engagement effort and the populations and/or communities you want to engage.
- Become knowledgeable about the community in terms of its economic conditions, political structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, and experience with engagement efforts. Learn about the community's perceptions of those initiating the engagement activities.
- Go into the community, establish relationships, build trust, work with the formal and informal leadership, and seek commitment from community organizations and leaders to create processes for mobilizing the community.
- Remember and accept that community self-determination is the responsibility and right of all people who comprise a community. You should not assume that you can bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest.
- Partnering with the community is necessary to create change and improve health.
- You must recognize and respect community diversity. Awareness of the various cultures of a community and other factors of diversity must be paramount in designing and implementing community engagement approaches. (Engaging these diverse populations will require the use of multiple engagement strategies).
- Community engagement can only be sustained by identifying and mobilizing community assets, and by developing capacities and resources for community decisions and action.
- You must be prepared to release control of actions or interventions to the community and be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of the community.

Community collaboration requires long-term commitment on the part of the engaging organization and its partners. To earn public trust and the trust of your partners:

- Be clear. People want direction.
- Be concise. Too much information is a barrier to understanding.
- Be correct. Check facts. Update frequently.



- Be connected. Know the people to reach in key communities and build relationships with them.
- Be confident—but don't confuse confidence with control. People trust the confidence shown by real leaders, not the control tactics of authority figures.
- Be transparent. Make your goals, values and priorities evident.
- Be a role model. Practice these principles as a model for your partners.