

# Tips for building meaningful relationships with communities

This document provides colleagues with five tips to initiating and building relationships with underserved communities.

## 1.) IDENTIFY THE COMMUNITIES

It is easy to say that we should and can work with all communities. However, to be intentional in our work it is helpful to focus on one or two communities so we can meaningfully dedicate our time and energy into the communities of choice. Choosing a community depends on a number of factors that can be, but not limited to, gaps in opportunities, priorities as a community, demographics in the area, and more. Think about the communities that are under served and underrepresented. Consider who you are serving well and who you could serve better.

## 2.) UNDERSTAND THE WAY THE COMMUNITY FUNCTIONS

Before jumping quick to identify the needs of the community and implementing programming, understand the ways in which the communities live out their daily lives. Where does the community eat, live, learn, play, and connect spiritually and how do they do these things? What are the communication networks in the area?

## 3.) IDENTIFY INFORMAL AND FORMAL LEADERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Leaders in communities can range from religious leaders to government officials to neighbors to local organizations. By communicating with community members, you can work to identify who already does work within the community and already has established relationships. Understand that there may be people who are always tapped. These people may not always be a good representation of what communities prioritize or trust.

## 4.) WORK DIRECTLY WITH COMMUNITIES TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS NEEDS

Data can be helpful with identifying many needs. However, data usually provides information based on an outside view. Therefore, to avoid imposing a deficit lens on communities, work with communities to identify and address what they think their needs are.

## 5.) AVOID TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Avoid one-and-done approaches. The key to creating and building relationships is providing clear, two way communication between groups and maintaining relationships with communities. Try engaging with community members informally at locations where target groups conduct their daily lives. Over time these relationships can have positive results in the professional arena.

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