
Civic Engagement Information Brief

A Collective Voice: Supporting Civic Engagement and Partnerships to Impact Community Health and Well-Being

What is Civic Engagement and why is it important?

Civic engagement is the way in which people participate in the life of their community to improve and shape its future. Strategic alignment is built from an inclusive, culturally relevant and collaborative voice. However, civic participation tends to be cumbersome because information is often ill-catered to citizens and residents often feel as though their voices are never heard. Being civically engaged can be challenging, time-consuming, and discouraging, all of which impede one's motivation to

engage. The demands of everyday life require the synthezation of complex information to alleviate the time commitment necessary to stay informed in a society with continual change that impacts Coachella Valley communities. Not only do people want to understand what is going on in their communities, they want their voice to be heard and have the opportunity to inform local decisions, policies, and processes.

Breaking down knowledge silos and creating a joint understanding of relevant issues from residents' lived perspectives can help form opportunities to address unmet community needs and identify priorities.ⁱ Well-informed residents are more equipped to build upon a shared and collaborative voice, increasing purposeful dialogue and public and private accountability while collectively striving toward community building and enhancement.ⁱⁱ Studies have long indicated that robust, meaningful community engagement drives a variety of communal benefits, including strengthened networks

of people with shared motivations, perspectives and values that shape, promote and enable a responsive and effective community.ⁱⁱⁱ

History

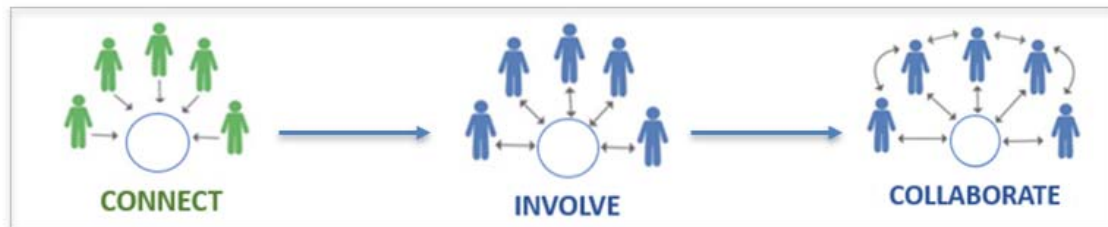
Historically, the action, delivery and promotion of health and well-being services are driven by health professionals and organizations with minimal guidance from those potentially impacted.^{iv} Trending methods now focus on higher public involvement as studies demonstrate practices cannot be sustainable and fully effective without the participation of the intended groups.^v Additionally, increasing distrust of public leaders, greater needs and stagnant resources are pressing on local private and public agencies to make information, engagement, collaboration and accountability impactful for residents.^{vi} Charged with using public funds most efficiently and equitably under tight budgets, local governments are also pressured to confront rising disparities without increased resources to address them.^{vii}

The top-down governance approach that has traditionally guided decisions, generates distrust among communities to nonprofits, government agencies, provider services, and community organizations.^{viii} Consequences of broken trust can be challenging to overcome. Gaps in public communication across sectors can lead to unmotivated, disinterested communities which generates fewer successful programs.^{ix} Data-driven solutions must be inextricably linked with local leadership and community ownership to ensure the likelihood of sustained success.^{xi} This can be promoted with easy-to-consume data, interactive stories, public transparency and utilizing community input, all increasingly popular national methods.^{xii} Further, data-driven approaches recognize that evidence "comes from many sources and restricting evidence to single methods and measures is likely to be narrowing, distorting and misleading."^{xiii} An inclusive, evidence-guided governance structure for the best possible community outcomes should be the prerogative of citizens and the mission of public organizations.



Source: TNTP. "Recommended Feedback Loop."

Institutional funding silos and disassociated organizations working without external collaboration impedes the ability to make meaningful, sustainable impact on community efforts.^{xiv} Facilitating equitable, progressive and timely involvement through diverse partnerships will help ensure a culturally appropriate and representative voice.^{xv} In addition to siloed approaches to information sharing, implementation challenges also pose a threat to the success of collective efforts. In these scenarios, community desires do not often move past discussions and action is rarely seen.^{xvi}



Potential Impact of Civic Engagement

Breaking down information silos strengthens two-way platforms for people to engage with their communities, confident that the actualization of change is more likely to occur. Contextual awareness of policies and processes encourages residents to participate in open discussions, learn from the diverse views, develop relationships, and build trust.^{xvii} Bridging relationships, creating spaces for resident-driven dialogue, and creating partnerships across various levels of hierarchy and power can promote healthy social norms and aid the connection of individuals to local resources.^{xviii} Increasing meaningful conversations, through shared values, will improve community members' capacity and opportunity to directly support their own communities in culturally relevant ways.^{xix} Without crucially-needed resident participation and local partnerships to dictate need and promote communal buy-in, efforts for increased civic activity will ultimately falter. Conversely, mutual responsibility and strategic diffusion of power to empower community members will promote lasting change while generating greater impact to unmet needs.^{xx} Crucially, a more community-involved approach can also promote trust formation through consensus and solution visibility.^{xxi}

Building Platforms in Coachella Valley

The Coachella Valley region has a diverse geography and demographic makeup. Residents in rural unincorporated areas and urban cities alike need a strengthened regional voice, a voice crafted in united purpose and from differing values, priorities, perceptions and lived experiences that reflect the region's unique placement in the state. Civic engagement is at the forefront of building community capacity, empowering individuals, bridging communication barriers, and unifying toward a shared goal.^{xxii} Preparing residents to personally evaluate issues relevant to unmet needs, desires and future impact through policy analysis will minimize disengagement and allow individuals to approach engagement platforms with confidence. Through lived experience, a more informed public will help create meaningful and productive conversations at local and state policy levels that enable residents to be a catalyst for change.^{xxiii}

Building platforms and encouraging conversations by providing relevant, straightforward policy and information analysis will promote community organizing, the process by which communities are helped to identify and understand common issues and providing the material to become engaged with one's respected community.^{xxiv} Continued efforts are needed to condense pertinent information and inform individuals and organizational partners of potential policy ramifications, validate their evidence-based work and form strategic visions that will strengthen the Coachella Valley's collective voice and promote resiliency. Through alignment of resources, goals and needs, residents from all Coachella Valley communities can harness collective power to construct an increasingly impactful, united voice. Through these efforts, alignment toward shared regional goals can be furthered and community members will

continuously develop skills needed to advocate for their communities in the future. Creating environments that foster well-prepared and equipped individuals to engage confidently regardless of the issue, scale or potential impact is a demonstrated need and asset to this goal.

ⁱ Adler, Richard P. and Judy Goggin. "What do we mean by 'civic engagement'?" *Journal of Transformative Education* 3, no. 3 (2005): 236-253. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1541344605276792>

ⁱⁱ McCoy, Martha L and Patrick L. Scully. "Deliberative Dialogue to Expand Civic Engagement: What Kind of Talk Does Democracy Need?" *National Civic Review* 9, no. 2 (2002): PAGES. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241152523_Deliberative_Dialogue_to_Expand_Civic_Engagement_What_Kind_of_Talk_Does_Democracy_Need

ⁱⁱⁱ Putnam, Robert D. "The Prosperous Community," *The American Prospect* 4, no. 13 (1993): 1-11. <http://staskulesh.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/prosperouscommunity.pdf>

^{iv} O'Mara-Eves, Alison, Ginny Brunton, Josephine Kavanagh, Farah Jamal, and James Thomas. "Abstracts: Community engagement in public health interventions to reduce health inequalities: mapping the evidence against policy objectives." *The Lancet* 380, no. Supplement 3: 59. [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)60415-8.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(13)60415-8.pdf)

^v Barnes, Melody and Paul Schmitz. "Community Engagement Matters (now more than ever)". *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2016. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/community_engagement_matters_now_more_than_ever

^{vi} Peterson, Pete, David Smith, Kristi Tate, and Ashley Trim. *Golden Governance: Building Effective Public Engagement in California*. California Forward, 2011. <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/davenport-institute/content/golden-gov-report.pdf>

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Barnes, Melody and Paul Schmitz. "Community Engagement Matters (now more than ever)". *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2016. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/community_engagement_matters_now_more_than_ever

^{ix} Smith, Amy V., Cio Hernandez, Cara Mae Woledge-McGarry, Dale Murai, Doris Y. Estremera, Kristi Skjerdai. *Health Equity and Community Engagement Report: Best Practices, Challenges and Recommendations for Local Health Departments, Bay Area Regional Summary*. Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, 2013. http://barhii.org/download/publications/hecer_regionalsummary.pdf

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Schorr, Lisbeth and Frank Farrow. *An Evidence Framework to Improve Results*. Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2014. <https://www.cssp.org/policy/evidence/AN-EVIDENCE-FRAMEWORK-TO-IMPROVE-RESULTS.pdf>

^{xiv} Smith, Amy V., Cio Hernandez, Cara Mae Woledge-McGarry, Dale Murai, Doris Y. Estremera, Kristi Skjerdai. *Health Equity and Community Engagement Report: Best Practices, Challenges and Recommendations for Local Health Departments, Bay Area Regional Summary*. 2013. http://barhii.org/download/publications/hecer_regionalsummary.pdf

^{xv} Glanz, Karen, Barbara Rimer, and Kasisomayajula Viswanath. *Health behavior: theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. <http://bcs.wiley.com/he-bcs/Books?action=index&itemId=0787996149&bcsId=4866>

^{xvi} Smith, Amy V., Cio Hernandez, Cara Mae Woledge-McGarry, Dale Murai, Doris Y. Estremera, Kristi Skjerdai. *Health Equity and Community Engagement Report: Best Practices, Challenges and Recommendations for Local Health Departments, Bay Area Regional Summary*. 2013. http://barhii.org/download/publications/hecer_regionalsummary.pdf

^{xvii} Meskell, Darlene. "Increasing Citizen Engagement in Government." Intergovernmental Solution Newsletter. Engaging Citizens in Government (2009). <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/davenport-institute/content/foundational/engaging-citizens-govt-gsa.pdf>

^{xviii} Ferris, Melanie. "Social connectedness and health." *Wilder Research*. 2012. <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/social-connectedness-and-health>

^{xix} Smith, Amy V., Cio Hernandez, Cara Mae Woledge-McGarry, Dale Murai, Doris Y. Estremera, Kristi Skjerdai. *Health Equity and Community Engagement Report: Best Practices, Challenges and Recommendations for Local Health Departments, Bay Area Regional Summary*. 2013. http://barhii.org/download/publications/hecer_regionalsummary.pdf

^{xx} Barnes, Melody and Paul Schmitz. "Community Engagement Matters (now more than ever)". *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2016. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/community_engagement_matters_now_more_than_ever

^{xxi} Schorr, Lisbeth, and Frank Farrow. *An evidence framework to improve results*. Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2014. <https://www.cssp.org/policy/evidence/AN-EVIDENCE-FRAMEWORK-TO-IMPROVE-RESULTS.pdf>

^{xxii} Glanz, Karen, Barbara Rimer, and Kasisomayajula Viswanath. *Health behavior: theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. <http://bcs.wiley.com/he-bcs/Books?action=index&itemId=0787996149&bcsId=4866>

^{xxiii} Peterson, Pete, David Smith, Kristi Tate, and Ashley Trim. *Golden Governance: Building Effective Public Engagement in California*. California Forward, 2011. <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/davenport-institute/content/golden-gov-report.pdf>

^{xxiv} Glanz, Karen, Barbara Rimer, and Kasisomayajula Viswanath. *Health behavior: theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. <http://bcs.wiley.com/he-bcs/Books?action=index&itemId=0787996149&bcsId=4866>