
REPRESENTING & DEFINING THE COMMUNITY

Working in a participatory manner means identifying the community you are working with and who from the community should participate.

Here are a few questions to keep in mind when defining the community:

1. Who represents the community?
2. Which individuals, agencies or organizations have influence in the community and what is their sphere of influence?
3. Are key members community residents or do they work for community-based organizations?
4. Whom does the individual or community-based organization represent or report to?
5. Who has the time, resources and flexibility to attend partnership meetings and take responsibility for action items?
6. Who is defined as “outside” the community and should not be invited to participate?

It is important to keep in mind that no one organization or individual can represent an entire community.

To ensure a diverse and representative partnership, members should be recruited from various sectors of the community.

Above from: Giachello AL, author; Ashton D, Kyler P, Rodriguez ES, Shanker R, Umemoto A, eds. 2007. *Making Community Partnerships Work: A Toolkit*. White Plains, NY: March of Dimes Foundation.

Representing the community is an iterative process. Holding a variety of “stakeholder”/partnership hui (meetings) can help explore who might have interest or influence in the issue and have time and resources to participate. Asking people who else should participate, who has influence, who has a valuable perspective, etc. can help identify key members. The danger of defining your partnership can be in deciding too quickly who wants to be a part of it rather than exploring who needs to be in the partnership.

Keep in mind that an effective partnership needs to be large enough to represent the community and small enough to be effective to get things done. Typically, an effective working partnership is between 5 and 15 members. This core group are the people doing the main work of the partnership. One way to involve a greater number of people is to include Advisory Boards who you might meet with quarterly (or the like) to keep informed on progress and receive feedback.





Key discussion questions:

Who might you involve in your partnership?

What process will you use to explore potential partners?

What structure might you use? (Core member and advisory groups)

