Community Engagement for Cooperative Extension:
What is Community Engagement?
Series Publication 1 of 7
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What is community engagement?

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention defines community engagement as, "the process of **working collaboratively with and through groups of people** affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations **to address issues affecting the well-being of those people**."[1]

Community engagement addresses the core concerns of residents and stakeholders by engaging them in a process of initiating, drafting, and implementing community-based programs. Community engagement guides collaboration and communication among organizations, stakeholders, and the public to create sustainable community-driven change[2] Some community-based programs may seek to solve a specific problem, others may involve policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes (Table 1).[3]

Table 1. PSE Change Definitions and Examples

Change Type	Definition	Examples
Policy	Institutionalizing new rules, procedures, or passing laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, etc.	• Adopting nutritional standards to determine which foods or beverages can be sold or served at meetings and events. • Passing a law allowing residents to plant community gardens in vacant lots.
Systems	Involves changes made to the rules within an organization; focuses on infrastructure within a school, park, worksite, or other setting.	• Changing the vending machine options to include more nutritious items. • Training pre-school teachers how to incorporate more physical activity throughout the day.
Environment	Includes changes to the physical environment.	• Installing a sidewalk or bike lane. • Re-arranging items in a store to feature nutritious foods more prominently.

Community engagement principles utilize specific methods to intentionally engage a wide range of community members, including those who historically have not participated in program or PSE change development.[1]

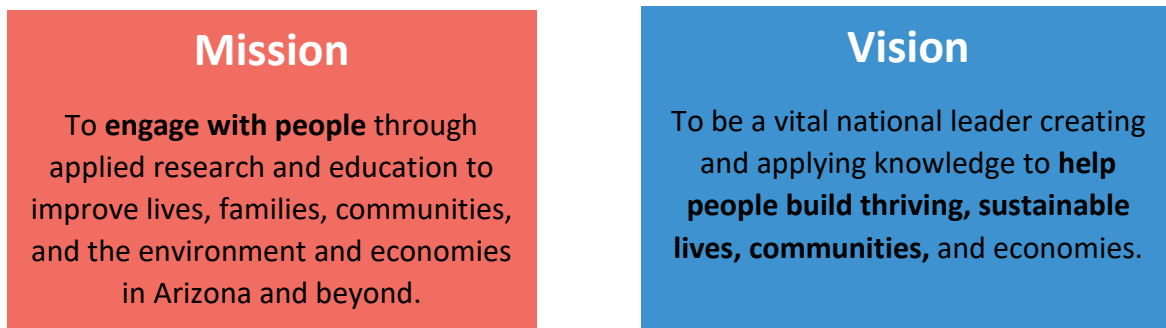## Why engage community members in program and PSE development and implementation?

Each community has different needs and assets that require unique solutions to complex issues. Complex issues such as improving water usage, reducing hunger, or building financial security will have different solutions in different communities. These unique solutions vary based on the demographics, existing resources, and needs of each community. For example, efforts to reduce hunger in an urban area populated by families with young children will look different than efforts to reduce hunger in a rural area with an older population that live at least 20 miles from a grocery store.

Community members often already know what needs to change in their community to help residents live healthier lives. Community engagement includes understanding who lives in the community and identifying what strategies would be most effective in addressing problems identified by the community. They may lack technical skills or resources to make the needed changes. The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension (Extension) can create opportunities for community members to engage in program development or PSE change work by sharing their knowledge and expertise. Through this collaboration, Extension and community members can create more successful programs and interventions that have more potential to enact wide-spread change and can be sustained by the community.

How does community engagement align with the mission of Cooperative Extension?

Extension's Mission and Vision (Figure 1) involve engaging with people to build and improve lives, environments, and communities.[4]

Figure 1. The UA Cooperative Extension's Mission and Vision

Mission	**Vision**
To **engage with people** through applied research and education to improve lives, families, communities, and the environment and economies in Arizona and beyond.	To be a vital national leader creating and applying knowledge to **help people build thriving, sustainable lives, communities,** and economies.

In building a strong relationship with the community, the community can then ask Extension to bring research and technical skills to these communities. The communities then use these resources to make changes and improve the health of their community.

The Spectrum of Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation (Figure 2) encompasses a broad array of engagement activities.[5] The activities are conceptualized as a continuum with varying levels of methods to engage with the community. Each level includes different activities as well as different depths of community engagement (Table 2).[5]

Figure 2. The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2's) Spectrum of Public Participation

| Inform | Consult | Involve | Collaborate | Community Directs |

Table 2. Examples of Community Engagement Activities from the Spectrum of Public Participation

Spectrum Level		
Inform	Provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the program's work, including the problems being addressed and potential solutions to the problem.	Press releases, fact sheets, social media campaigns, forums, and tabling to provide education or information at events.
Consult	Obtain community feedback when analyzing problems, considering alternative solutions, and making decisions.	Surveys, focus groups, pop-up engagements, community demonstrations, asset-mapping, community walkshops.*
Involve	Work directly with community members throughout the planning and implementing of a project to ensure their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered in decision-making.	Conferences, workshops, community mapping, health impact assessments, digital storytelling.**
Collaborate	Partner with community members in each aspect of the decision-making process, include, develop, and consider alternative solutions and ultimately identify a preferred solution.	Advisory committees, task forces, community ambassadors, and formalized agreements with coalitions or community organizations.
Community Directs	Place final decision-making power in the hands of the community.	Participatory budgeting,*** ballot initiatives.

*Community walkshops involve facilitated, interactive walking tours of a chosen area of the community, with the goal of better understanding community member's perspective on its unique assets, challenges, and opportunities.[6-7]

**Digital Storytelling involves telling stories using photos and videos.[8]

***Participatory budgeting asks community members to brainstorm ideas for projects, develop proposals, and then vote on which projects should be funded.[8-1]

Continuation of the Community Engagement Series

This is the first article of a seven part-series on community engagement, a collaboration between the University of Arizona's School of Nutritional Sciences & Wellness - Cooperative Extension, SNAP-Ed (UA SNAP-Ed) and the Community Research, Evaluation, and Development (CRED) team from the Norton School of Human Ecology. The publications reflect the concepts of seven interactive, online learning modules about community engagement that were developed by the UA SNAP-Ed and the CRED team. The next publication in this series will focus on understanding community demographics by using secondary data and Geographic Information Systems maps.

The full Community Engagement in Cooperative Extension article series includes:

1. What is Community Engagement?

2. Using Interactive Maps to Understand Communities

3. Who is and is not Participating in Community Engagement?

4. Strategies to Improve Representation

5. Spectrum of Public Participation: Inform and Consult

6. Spectrum of Public Participation: Involve

7. Spectrum of Public Participation: Collaborate and Community Directs

All articles in the series are available at the following link:

Community Engagement in Cooperative Extension Series

Citations

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Division of Community Health. A Practitioner's Guide for Advancing Health Equity: Community Strategies for Preventing Chronic Disease. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: CDC/ATSDR Committee on Community Engagement. Principles of Community Engagement: First Edition. Published 1997. Accessed June 9, 2021.

3. What is Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Change? Food Trust. http://healthtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2012-12-28-Policy_Systems_and_Environmental_Change.pdf. Published 2012. Accessed July 6, 2021.

4. About. Cooperative Extension Web Site. https://extension.arizona.edu/about. Accessed June 9, 2021.

5. International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2's) Spectrum of Public Participation. International Association of Public Participation. http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/imported/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf. Published 2007. Accessed June 9, 2021.

6. Community engagement toolkit: Guidance and resources for engaging community in planning and policy development. Futurewise. http://www.futurewise.org/assets/reports/CET.pdf. Published 2014. Accessed June 9, 2021.

7. King, A., Woodroffe, J. Walking Interviews. https://eprints.utas.edu.au/27953/. Published 2017. Accessed, June 9, 2021.

8. Lambert J., Hessler, B. Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community. Berkely, CA: Digital Diner Press; 2002.

9. Walcott, E. Engaging the public in local government decisions: Empower. Michigan State University: MSU Extension. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/engaging_the_public_in_local_government_decisions_empower. Published 2017. Accessed June 9, 2021.

10. PB Cycle 6. City of Cambridge Participatory Budgeting. https://pb.cambridgema.gov/pbcycle6. Published 2019. Accessed June 9, 2021.

Resources

Community Engagement Spectrum Examples

Narratives of Community Engagement - A Systematic Review-Derived Conceptual Framework for Public Health Interventions

Strategies to Promote Equitable Community Engagement in Decision-Making Processes

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This information has been reviewed by University faculty.
extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az2023-2023.pdf

Other titles from this series can be found at:
extension.arizona.edu/pubs/community-engagement-cooperative-extension-series