

## Engagement Step #1: Community Entry

Community entry is the process of entering community spaces intending to meet people where community members are most comfortable. Staff leave their traditional work places and go into the community to seek out and speak with members who live there. It may be uncomfortable or cause anxiety at first, but it is a first step to engaging socially excluded community members.

There are several ways to begin approaching community members:

- Third-Party Facilitated Approach (Service Provider)
- Door-to-door Neighbourhood Walkabout
- Community Events
- Outreach Activity

### Third-Party Facilitated Approach (Service Provider)

With this approach you need to build relationships with service providers who work with socially excluded community member. It will be important to gain their trust and identify how this arrangement is mutually beneficial for the service provider and/or their clients.

### Things to remember

- This is your first step in getting access to the community of stakeholders that are on low income. Remember that you are not the expert, and that you are here to learn.
- Introduce yourself to local service providers such as: the local health unit, the women's resource centre, social services, libraries, food bank, etc.
- As someone who is new you will need to identify who you are and should wear a name tag.
- Observe the interactions between the service provider and clients, as sometimes, service providers are not well-regarded by community members. You will need to determine whether or not to gain entry through this provider.
- It will be essential to remember that when you work directly with the community members that you consider and work with the service provider at all times, so that conflicts do not occur.
- Develop a relationship with these service providers; explain to them that you want to make contact with their low income clients for the purpose of understanding the needs of the community members in trying to access local physical activity opportunities.
- Also get the perspective from the service providers on the community members needs, recognizing that these may be very different from what their clients would say.



A joint initiative of  
BC Recreation and Parks  
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### **Door-to-door Neighbourhood Walkabout**

Going door to door will allow you to meet community members and learn about who is in the community, as well as let you learn first hand about the community's impression of physical activity opportunities in the community.

#### **Things to remember**

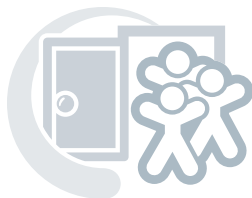
- Determine a part of the local neighbourhood that you wish to walkabout, ensure that the size is doable in your allotted timeframe.
- Distribute leaflets door to door with information as to what you are doing and that you want to get input from a number of neighbours on active living opportunities. Providing leaflets prior will help reduce people's concerns about opening the door to strangers.
- As a staff person you may not be comfortable going on your own, so you may want to bring along another staff member. However, remember not to bring too many people, as this may also intimidate people.
- When you plan to visit, make sure that you go at a convenient time when residents will be home. You will need to consider the community and whether they will be attending special events, religious functions, etc. Remember that it may not be the most convenient time for you.
- Sometimes you may be invited into the home. Beforehand, check if your organization has policy whether this is allowed. If it is not allowed, be polite and indicate that at this time you are unable to come in. Trust your instincts whether it is good for you to go into the home.
- Bring information about free or low-cost active living opportunities for those on low-income.
- If your community has one, use this opportunity to discuss the fee subsidy program and get their perspective on whether they would be able to participate under this program.

### **Community Events and Meetings**

Attending community events is another way to introduce yourself to community members you may not already be engaging. You may wish to be selective about which community events to attend. Events such as fundraisers and board meetings do not necessarily draw people who are not already participating. If your focus is meeting those who are not engaged, try events such as faith community socials or cultural events.

#### **Things to remember**

- Be prepared to discuss why you are at the community event, as the community may not understand why you are there.
- Initially it might seem easier for you to be behind a booth. However it is a more formal approach and you may not get to mingle with community members.
- Often service providers stick together at community events and do not fully engage with the community. Try to actually seek out community members and develop conversations with them.
- If you are attending a cultural community event you may feel uncomfortable. However community members do not expect you to understand everything about the culture and this kind of event provides a good opportunity to learn and ask questions.



### Outreach Activity

This is a more traditional approach to the community but places the service provider as “the expert.” While this avenue may be the most comfortable, it may not develop interactive and collaborative relationships. However sometimes it is the only way to make contact with the community.

### Things to remember

- Rather than a standard informational facility tour, try inviting community members to come into the facility and ask them give you a tour through their eyes so you can learn what is important to them.
- Provide “sample” programs that people can participate in.
- Provide “baby sitting” for parents.
- Make it fun, have food and drinks and take this opportunity to chat with community members.

**Adapted from the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit:** A toolkit developed through the national Working Together Project, initiated by the Vancouver Public Library to explore methods for libraries develop programs and services by and for low-income community members through a community development approach. The techniques and advice in this book are transferrable to the active living sector. The full toolkit is available for download from [www.librariesincommunities.ca](http://www.librariesincommunities.ca). The project was funded from 2004 to 2008 by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) and co-led by the Vancouver Public Library, Regina Public Library, Halifax Public Libraries and Toronto Public Library.

