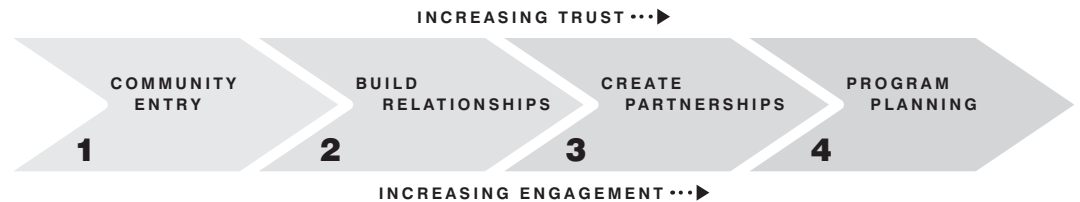


## Engagement: How Do You Begin?

The methods we currently use to engaging community members are effective at reaching a majority of the population. But in order to engage those who are **not** already participating, we need to change the lens through which we view our services and how we do things.

Understanding the barriers that prevent participation in physical activity is the first step. Next we need to build trust and include excluded community members in planning and decision-making.

These four steps outline a method to increase involvement and inclusion of people who are often left out:



A joint initiative of BC Recreation and Parks Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon.



ActNowBC.ca

An initiative of these BC Healthy Living Alliance members



Canadian Cancer Society  
BRITISH COLUMBIA AND YUKON



### Time and resources

There may be limitations on the time and resources you can spend on involving community members. Do not be discouraged if you cannot move through the four steps at once. You may only be able to commit a short time each month to engagement. As you begin making connections and building relationships, share your learnings and successes to garner support and resources for increased community involvement.

### Change is slow

When learning how to do something new, it takes time and perseverance to make it successful. Building community relationships and involving the community in planning is a long and imperfect process. There may be false starts, but the main thing to remember is that by involving community members that were previously excluded, we are moving one step closer towards improving the health of our community.

### Giving up the lead

Possibly one of the most difficult aspects of community engagement is to move from being a leader to a facilitator. Your role is not to tell community members what healthy choices they need to make, but to discover what will enable them to make healthy choices. You may already have creative ideas and experience, but use these to support rather than direct.

## STEP 1 – COMMUNITY ENTRY

The first step in the process of community engagement is finding the way in. This strategy will take you away from the workplace, to seek out the people in the community who may be socially isolated from physical activity opportunities and speak with them in their neighbourhoods

**GOAL:** To meet and begin conversations with community members who are not already participating in physical activity opportunities.

Four techniques to help you take the first step in connecting with the community are:

- Third- Party Facilitated Approach
- Door to Door and Neighbourhood Walkabout
- Community Events
- Outreach

## STEP 2 – RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Building relationships strengthens the link between the socially excluded community and you as a service provider. It is not a one-time thing – a step to take and then move on – but an ongoing process that needs to be incorporated into every stage of community engagement.

**GOAL:** To develop rapport and trust with community members who would not normally participate in established physical activity opportunities.

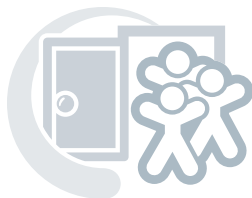
It can only happen when staff leave the building and introduce themselves in neighbourhood spaces that are familiar to the community members. Here are three key techniques to help you strengthen links:

- Hanging Out
- Group Discussions
- Attending Regular Meetings and Events

## STEP 3 – PARTNERSHIPS

In this context, a partnership is a recognized relationship between service providers, and can be formal or informal. Through partnerships, you can gain credibility and support from multiple levels, build a case for program or service continuation and continue to meet excluded community members.

**GOAL:** To learn about the agency's services, connect with community members they serve and begin exploring the possibility of community-led programs.



When considering a partnership with community organizations:

- Be clear about your reasons for developing a particular partnership.
- Determine the parameters and nature of the partnership and formalize as required.
- Remember to set time aside for evaluation and reflection on how effective the partnership is.

#### STEP 4 – COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAM PLANNING

***“This is not what we are used to. That first meeting was really painful because it took so long to make a decision. We [sport and recreation staff] were looking at each other going ‘Is this for real? I don’t know if I can do this.’ But we need to be committed to this process if it is really going to be for the women.” (sport and recreation staff)***

From Women Organizing Activities for Women project (Frisby & Millar, 2002)

Community-led program planning means collaborating with community members to define, develop and deliver programs. The results of this process are programs and events based on community-articulated needs and in which the community has a personal interest and investment.

**GOAL:** To facilitate the development of appropriate physical activity opportunities for (formerly) excluded community members by (formerly) excluded community members.

It takes time and patience to:

- Collaboratively identify a need or interest for the program.
- Engage community members in planning discussions.
- Collaboratively conduct and evaluate the program and the process.

Remember that people affected by poverty, are most often also socially excluded. They do not engage in existing physical activity opportunities because their needs and interests are not addressed and they feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

To change this, community members need to be involved in the entire process of program planning.

**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.

#### Source

Frisby, W. & Millar, S. (2002). The actualities of doing community development to promote the inclusion of low-income populations in local sport and recreation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, (3), 209-233.

