



## What is Engagement?

Social inclusion means that people have the opportunity to exercise autonomy and to influence decisions that affect their lives, to display competence and to feel valued.

Engagement is a component of social inclusion. To make opportunities more socially inclusive, engage the “hard to reach” by:

- Learning about people in your community
- Working with community partners to meet marginalized people
- Building trusting relationships with marginalized people
- Facilitating opportunities for marginalized people to have a voice
- Working towards involving people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs, services and policies<sup>1</sup>

### Why don't people become engaged?

There is an assumption that anyone can become involved in public life, but there are many reasons why, in particular, people affected by poverty are not involved.

- Lack of trust
- Believing that those in power are not interested in their issues
- Feeling that their input would not be acted upon
- Unaware of opportunities to be involved and provide input
- Personal priorities take precedence<sup>2</sup>

### Why is it important to engage people?

The following quotes exemplify the benefits of involving people in decisions that can affect their lives. The quotes are from a three-year research project, Women Organizing Activities for Women, conducted by the University of British Columbia, which involved women on low income and community practitioners working together to plan physical activity opportunities collaboratively.<sup>3</sup>

- **Potential for better programs, policies and procedures**  
*“I’m trying to make a difference for other people who do not have the resources or the places to go or the things to do. We want to see this continue.”* (woman on low income)
- **People want to have a voice and welcome the opportunity to participate**  
*“It’s all about the sense of community, that we are important, and that somebody is listening. We don’t get listened to very often.”* (woman on low income)
- **Opportunity to share information and learn from each other**  
*“We’ve got gazillions of resources. You know when women start seeing all that they can do, it’s mind-boggling. This group is very diversified and we use a lot of our own talents, we have become the instructors for some of these recreation programs.”* (woman on low income)



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- **Builds community participation and citizenship**

*“There is power in numbers and I am feeling more confident because I am not alone and we are connected to people who know the system.”* (woman on low income)

- **Healthier community members and quality of life**

*“This [WOAW] is helping me get more confidence in myself, meeting new people, being more active, increasing my self esteem.”* (woman on low income)

**What is the difference?**

We currently have processes for planning and implementing programs, services and policies. However, these can be enhanced by building relationships with community members and partner organizations to facilitate engagement. Aside from the potential to increase participation, you will move one step closer to a socially inclusive community.

	Traditional Practices	By Including Engagement
<b>COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT &amp; NEEDS IDENTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relies on data sources, such as statistics, user surveys, census information, demographics, comment cards.</li> </ul> <p>CONSIDER THIS: The socially excluded are under represented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● By building trusting relationships with marginalized community members themselves and their service providers, a richer understanding of the wants and needs is gained.</li> <li>● Often, different barriers are revealed and trust is developed.</li> </ul>
<b>SERVICE PLANNING &amp; DELIVERY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff lead program, service and policy planning and implementation, often other staff are consulted and policies and practices of similar institutions are adopted.</li> </ul> <p>CONSIDER THIS: The input is provided from the perspective of staff and organizational needs rather than community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Working with the community to plan and implement programs, services and policies is only possible after staff develop relationships and gain the trust and respect of the people they meet.</li> <li>● Collaboratively planned programs, services and policies reflect community needs, choices and contributions.</li> </ul>
<b>EVALUATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Generally an in-house activity, looking at attendance statistics, comment cards and registration.</li> </ul> <p>CONSIDER THIS: These evaluation methods collect information from the already engaged and are tailored to those who are comfortable providing critical feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● By engaging marginalized community members and partner organization, evaluation can reveal qualitative information, such as perceptions, experiences, feelings and opinions about how programs, services and policies are meeting needs.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit

**References**

<sup>1</sup> Working Together Project. (2008). Community-Led Libraries Toolkit. Vancouver, BC.

<sup>2</sup> Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., & Stoker, G. (2001). Trends in Public Participation: Part 2 – Citizens’ Perspectives, Public Administration, 79(2). 445-455.

<sup>3</sup> 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.