

Community Engagement Done Well

Community engagement done well means sharing power with the communities affected by a decision, not just informing them or collecting a comment. It is how we make sure services fit the people they are meant to serve.

Content

Community engagement done well means sharing power with the communities affected by a decision, not just informing them or collecting a comment. It is how we make sure services fit the people they are meant to serve.

What authentic engagement looks like.

- Start early. Bring community in while the decision can still change, not at the end for approval.
- Share power. Invite people as co-designers who shape the work, not as an audience for a finished plan.
- Go to people. Meet communities where they are, in their language, on their schedule, in places they trust.
- Close the loop. Tell people what you heard, what changed because of it, and what could not change and why. Silence after engagement breaks trust.

What to avoid.

- Tokenism. One person asked to speak for a whole community, or input gathered and then ignored.
- Extraction. Taking people's time and stories without offering anything back, including, where appropriate, fair compensation.
- One-and-done. Engagement is a relationship, not a single meeting.

A note on trust. Some communities have been studied, surveyed, and let down before. Acknowledge that history honestly, and let your follow-through, not your promises, rebuild trust over time.

Done well, engagement changes the decision and strengthens the relationship. Done poorly, it does real harm. The difference is whether community voice actually shapes the outcome.

Share power. Invite people as co-designers who shape the work, not as an audience for a finished plan.

Identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed using Community Engagement Done Well.

Connect the guidance to the person's goals, program rules, access needs, and follow-up using Community Engagement Done Well.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Community Engagement Done Well to identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed.

Choose the sections of Community Engagement Done Well that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Community Engagement Done Well, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Community Engagement Done Well; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.

For community engagement staff, use Community Engagement Done Well to identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed; plan accessible participation, make influence visible, and close the feedback loop with community partners. Start by share power. Invite people as co-designers who shape the work, not as an audience for a finished plan.

Use cultural and community context to ask better questions, never to predict an individual or treat a group as monolithic.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

Community engagement done well means sharing power with the communities affected by a decision, not just informing them or collecting a comment. It is how we make sure services fit the people they are meant to serve. Step 1. Share power. Invite people as co-designers who shape the work, not as an audience for a finished plan. Step 2. Identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed using Community Engagement Done Well. Step 3. Connect the guidance to the person's goals, program rules, access needs, and follow-up using Community Engagement Done Well. Step 4. Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Community Engagement Done Well to identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed. Step 5. Choose the sections of Community Engagement Done Well that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule. Step 6. Document the action taken from Community Engagement Done Well, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner. Step 7. Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Community Engagement Done Well; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.