

Community Engagement Best Practices

- **Internally assess** gaps in programming and opportunities to connect with communities. What audiences are your programs and efforts currently reaching? **Who are you not reaching?**
- **Identify** formal and informal connections.
- **Plan.** Think about **who** you want to engage and **why**. The strategies for engagement will vary widely in different communities.
- **Reach out** to organizations who are already serving the populations you'd like to work with.
- **Invest** in relationships. Acknowledge that this work will not be done overnight. It is critical to take time to develop meaningful and trusting relationships. Real community engagement takes a lot of time.
- **LISTEN more.** Talk less.
- **Share power.** Recognize how power plays out in groups, and that there may be a power imbalance between a library and a grassroots community org. Be intentional in creating space for others to share their experiences and ideas.
- **Be honest** with yourself and your partners. **DO NOT** commit to things you cannot deliver.
- **Form a project** with benchmarks and an endpoint.
- **Measure** mutually agreed-upon outcomes.
- **Accountability.** Close the loop with your work. Do not engage community and not return to report out how what you have learned will inform the work. Identify opportunities for community stakeholders to continue to be involved.
- **Be flexible.** Recognize what you planned may not always work and you may have to go back and change things.
- **Recognize that relationships are ends in themselves.** Not all relationships result in an immediate project. You are doing the critical work of building extensive networks and those relationships are invaluable.

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