# What is equitable engagement?

Equitable engagement is a combination of processes that support the participation of people of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and low-income people in neighborhood groups’ outreach and public engagement processes. This type of engagement is about building strong and sustainable relationships and partnerships. Creating trusting relationships, increasing accessibility to facilities and services, and providing a range of opportunities to become involved are key actions that reflect on organizational attitudes and values about developing equitable engagement.

One of the key components of making engagement processes responsive, inclusive, and culturally appropriate is building the capacity of your organization to understand the implications of race, culture, and socio-economic status in decision-making. For community engagement to flourish, government entities and neighborhood groups alike must be open to organizational changes that are responsive to community insight and allow for shared power between communities and the organizations that serve them. Authentic community engagement cannot be about just involving more numbers of people; it needs to lift up underrepresented voices and incorporate them into the decision-making process.

# What is the value of including and bringing new voices to the table?

* Better outcomes for everyone
* Long-lasting relationships
* Strength in diversity
* Increased confidence in the system

# Set expectations that equitable engagement requires work

Effective engagement takes careful planning and acknowledgement. Each population your group works with presents a unique opportunity to broaden your understanding of who makes up your community.

# Build trust

* Ask the community how they would like to be engaged.
* Go out to the community instead of asking them to come to you. There is a greater likelihood of engagement from underserved communities when organizations take steps to enhance their relationships with those populations.
* Ask the community how your group can be of service to them.
* Learn about the community with a sincere interest.

# Find out who is in your neighborhood

Exploring the patterns of people in Seattle and King County: <http://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=3eb44a4fdf9a4fff9e1c105cd5e7fe27>

Do not schedule an event that overlaps with a cultural holiday or event Check calendars for cultural holidays and events.

* Check out the City of Seattle calendars for pre-planned events: <https://www.seattle.gov/event-calendar>
* Look on local blogs for events happening already in your neighborhood
* Check out cultural and religious observances: <http://diversity.missouristate.edu/observances.htm>

# Collaborate with ethnic media

* Visit the City of Seattle Ethnic Media Directory which is a list of ethnic media outlets serving the City of Seattle: [www.seattle.gov/iandraffairs/EMP](http://www.seattle.gov/iandraffairs/EMP)
* Keep in mind that media outlets need time to process requests. Ethnic media outlets receive many emails and sometimes a phone call may be a more appropriate way to contact them. Do not contact media outlets the day before an event wanting to push it out. Contact them weeks in advance.

# Increase accessibility

Consider the issues and barriers that would prevent people from your community from participating in your group. Brainstorm and implement ways to reduce those barriers and create a more accessible environment for your community group.

## Possible barriers include:

* **Language**
	+ Translate documents and have interpretation at events for members in your community who do not speak English
		- Translation isn’t free – and shouldn’t be. A primary driver in equity in engagement is that people who can translate should be compensated for it. Often, they are taken advantage of and asked to do it for free.
		- When scheduling a meeting with interpretation, take into account that the pace of a meeting offered in multiple languages will be different than the pace of a meeting offered in one language.
		- Need a translator or interpreter? Check out the Washington State Coalition for Language Access at [wascla.org](https://www.wascla.org/).
	+ [Use plain language](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/). If you’re talking about technical topics, simplify the language and check in with your group about whether or not they are understanding. Ask questions periodically to find out if your audience needs you to repeat or clarify. Check out this government site on plain language: [plainlanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/)
* **Location**
	+ American Disability Act (ADA) considerations
		- Is the meeting space accessible?
		- Are your materials accessible?
		- Do you provide accommodations at your meetings?
* **Time**
	+ Ask yourself: Does this have to be a meeting? Is there another way to get feedback?
		- Use Facebook Live.
		- Provide opportunities for community members to give feedback in photographic, voice recorded, or video formats.
		- Do online polls/surveys – [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).
		- Provide childcare – ask for qualified volunteers in your neighborhood.
* **Atmosphere**
	+ Does your process reflect, honor, and welcome the community?
	+ Do the venues you choose invite participation and engagement?