



## TWELVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ABCD IN ACTION

Most communities address social and economic problems with only a small amount of their total capacity. Much community capacity is not used and is needed! This is the challenge and opportunity of community engagement. Everyone in a community has something to offer. There is no one we don't need.

**1) EVERYONE HAS GIFTS.** With rare exception people can contribute and want to contribute. Gifts must be discovered. Gift giving opportunities must be offered. Strong communities know they need everyone. There is unrecognized capacity and assets in every community. Find it.

**2) RELATIONSHIPS BUILD A COMMUNITY.** See them, make them, and utilize them. An intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD and of all community building.

**3) COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT THE CENTER** can engage the wider community. People in leadership in everyday life (associations, congregations, neighborhoods, and local business) must be at the center of community initiatives rather than just helping agency leaders. It is essential to engage the wider community as actors (community members) not just as recipients of services (clients).

**4) LEADERS INVOLVE OTHERS AS ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY.** Leaders from the wider community of voluntary associations, congregations, neighborhoods, local business, can engage others from their sector. Community building leaders always need to have a constituency of people to involve. This "following" is based on trust, influence, and relationship. Strong community leaders invite a growing circle of people to act.

**5) PEOPLE CARE ABOUT SOMETHING.** Agencies and neighborhood groups often complain about apathy. Apathy is a sign of bad listening. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover their motivation to act.

**6) MOTIVATION TO ACT** must be identified. People who are not paid as staff will only act when it is very important. People will act on certain themes strongly felt; concerns to address, dreams to realize, and personal talents to contribute. Every community is filled with invisible



**7) LISTENING CONVERSATION** In 1:1 dialogue or in small group conversations is how to discover motivation and invite participation. Forms, surveys and asset maps can be useful to guide intentional listening and relationship building. Mapping is not a substitute for listening and talking face to face.

**8) ASK, ASK, ASK.** Once a person's possible 'gifts to give' and 'motivations to act' are recognized; an opportunity to act must be offered. Asking and inviting are key community building actions. "Join us. We need you." This is the song of community.

**9) ASKING QUESTIONS RATHER THAN GIVING ANSWERS INVITES STRONGER PARTICIPATION.** People in communities are usually asked to follow outside expert's answers for their community problems. Agencies usually ask community members to help with the agency's answer. A more powerful way to engage people is to invite communities to address 'questions' finding their own answer-- with agencies following to help.

**10) A PEOPLE-CENTERED "inside-out" ORGANIZATION IS THE KEY TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.** A "People centered" organization is one where local people control the organization and set the organization's agenda. Community engagement initiatives rarely succeed without residents as leaders organized to do intentional relationship building. It takes an organization of community members to organize a community. It is also very valuable to have a staff person to assist relationship building as a 'community organizer' following the community members leaders' agenda.

**11) INSTITUTIONS HAVE REACHED THEIR LIMITS IN PROBLEM-SOLVING.** All institutions such as government, non profits, and businesses are stretched thin in their ability to solve community problems. They can not be successful without engaging the rest of the community in solutions. We need to be more skillful in wider engagement. Everyone must do their part.

**12) INSTITUTIONS AS SERVANTS** – People better than programs engage the wider community. Institutions of government, non profits, and business can be of invaluable help supporting the work of community members to engage their fellow community members. Ask people what they need and offer help. Leaders in institutions have an essential role in community building as they lead by "stepping back" creating opportunities for citizenship, care, and real democracy.