

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

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Civic Leadership**

Video Transcript

[TEXT: YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE
ONLINE TRAINING SERIES]

[TEXT: CIVIC LEADERSHIP
ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY]

[TEXT: Hilary Binder-Aviles, Independent NGO Consultant]

Community Engagement

[LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand what community engagement is and why it's important.
2. Become familiar with different ways an NGO can foster community engagement.
3. Learn the benefits and challenges of community engagement.

In this lesson, you'll gain an understanding of what community engagement is, and why it's important, become familiar with different ways an NGO can foster community engagement, and learn some of the benefits and challenges.

NGOs exist to serve the public good – to make people's lives better and communities stronger. Too often, we think of community members only as people in need of our help.

Community engagement is about involving the people you serve, not just as beneficiaries of your projects, but as partners in accomplishing your mission.

Almost everyone – young or old, rich or poor, with or without formal education – has something they can contribute to an NGO's work. Some might have special knowledge or a unique skill to offer. Others might have the means to donate money, materials or supplies. Others still can give their time and bring their enthusiasm.

When people are actively engaged in efforts to improve their own lives and their neighbors' lives, they become more aware of and committed to solving problems. They also learn new skills and gain confidence in their ability to effect change. In short, engagement is empowering.





So how can an NGO actually practice community engagement?

You can start by involving community members in your projects. You might already conduct some sort of needs assessment where you ask, through surveys or focus groups, your target population about their needs. That's a great start, and you can take that one step further.

Consider creating a community advisory committee that meets regularly to provide input feedback on project plans and progress. A group like this can be a bridge between the NGO and the community, bringing valuable insights to your NGO and serving as champions of the project in the community. Take time to learn more about members of the community you serve – both those who participate in your projects and their families, friends and neighbors.

In addition to doing a community needs assessment, you can also conduct a community "assets" assessment. Through surveys, focus groups or community meetings, ask people what they know and what they know how to do. You'll find people with all kinds of knowledge, skills and experience they can contribute. For example, if someone likes to talk to their neighbors, they might be just the right person to help you carry out a survey or join your project advisory committee.

When the people you serve are involved in your NGO, your NGO will be more successful. Not only will your projects be more relevant to their needs, but you'll build collective ownership of your NGO's mission. Your community members will be more willing to support your NGO and its work in the future. When NGOs don't engage community members as partners, you miss opportunities to develop the assets that exist right in your own backyard.

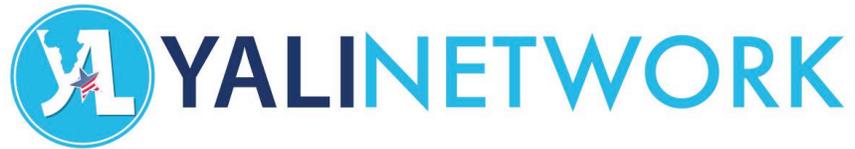
Over time, you can invest in building the skills of community members who are most engaged and provide them with opportunities to step into leadership roles. By cultivating new leaders, you expand the pool of talent to help you carry out the mission and ensure that your NGO's work will go on long after the founders are gone.

The leaders you cultivate can amplify your NGO's work in any number of ways. They can educate others in the community about the issues. They can serve as messengers in public education campaigns. They can mobilize others to get involved, speak out and take action.

Think of community engagement as an investment in the NGO's future. By building the capacity of the people you serve to be more involved in efforts to improve the community, you might just find your next capable staff members, volunteers, board members, even donors to your organization.

NGOs are humanitarian in nature, but they also can be empowerment organizations that facilitate the ability of people to realize their own visions for better lives and communities.





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