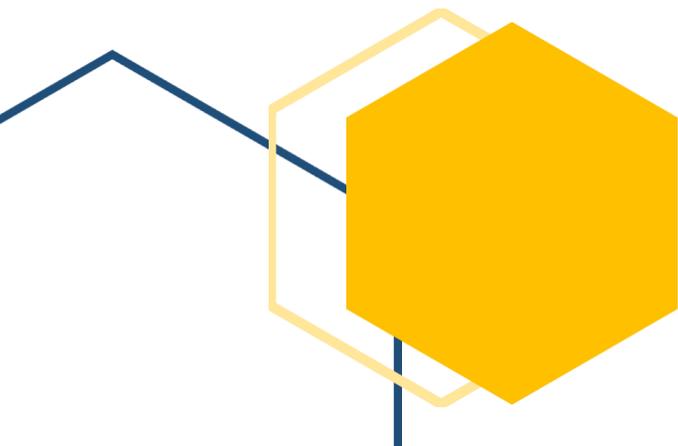




ENGAGING WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES: TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS IN IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

**CONSORTIUM FOR CANCER IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE ACTION GROUP**

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About This Resource

The Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science developed this set of tips and best practices to build capacity among implementation scientists and practitioners who want to work with rural communities to improve population health.

The idea resulted from a Community Participation Action Group brainstorming session at the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science. Action group members developed this resource collaboratively, drawing on their individual expertise in conducting implementation science in partnership with rural communities. Contributors included:

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Engaging with Rural Communities: Tips and Best Practices for Researchers and Practitioners in Implementation Science

Rural communities often have limited health care resources and an older population with lower health literacy. To help address health care needs, academic researchers should engage rural communities in implementation science. There are many ways to engage communities in this way. Your research team can adapt and apply the following insights and guidance to fit the specific context of communities and their unique needs.

Welcome Diverse Perspectives

Every community has strengths and constraints that can lead to important insights and impact engagement. Taking the time to listen, consider, and understand the community and its unique context is an important first step in respectful engagement.

Your team can facilitate action by speaking with community elders and other knowledge holders to document their attitudes about health care programs, communications, and needs. Paying strong respect to cultural heritage and welcoming diverse perspectives may also encourage more and deeper community engagement, which will help inform and advance programs that address health care needs.

Develop Authentic Relationships

Trust and patience are essential to successful engagement in any community, especially in rural settings where people tend to know each other very well and may be skeptical of outside researchers. Your research team should seek to create both the time and space to develop authentic relationships and bring any local languages into discussions. This helps to build trust and opens lines of communication for engagement. Cultural or community events provide important opportunities to connect and build partnerships together.

Engage Organizational Leaders

Identify community members with a history of supporting health-related promotions or programs. These may include:

- Hospital- or clinic-based leadership conducting community health needs assessments or outreach efforts
- County government officials
- County extension agents—employees at land-grant universities who deliver educational programs to assist people in economic and community



development; with family issues; and in agriculture, animal production, diet, and nutrition

- School board members
- The local department of health and its advisory council
- Child protective services
- Community-led organizations addressing drug abuse prevention and recovery
- Shelters for victims of domestic violence
- Food and emergency utility service payment support
- Interfaith alliances

Learn from Local Forums

Draw what information you can from:

- Newspapers
- Radio stations
- Social media
- Bulletin boards in local businesses

Listen to Seek Understanding

Actively listen to what community members say to you in any discussion you have with them. Emphasize that you (the research team) and communities can create solutions together, without insinuating any existing deficiencies or that there is a “wrong” way to address local concerns. Promote positive and respectful interactions between you, your team, and the local population.

Communicate Consistently

Mean what you say and say what you mean. From the very beginning and throughout the life of a project, communicate and interact with the community in a consistent way using plain language. This goes a long way in fostering trust and transparency in your engagement.

Strive for Equity

Ensure that everyone can meaningfully participate and have equal access to information and assistance, and make sure that research efforts contribute to the community beyond simply providing information and assistance. Seek funding to compensate community members for their time and wisdom at a level that is commensurate with compensation for academic employees. Whether your research



team is asking for or receiving information from rural communities, or sharing information with them, it is important to apply practices of equity.

Provide a Variety of Communication Options

You can help to diversify the ways people in the community share and engage with your research team by providing a variety of options for participation, such as holding in-person discussions, sending an email, or making a phone call.

Be Considerate

Be mindful of people's time. Community members will have various responsibilities and other time commitments. Be reasonable in your requests.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

When engaging with rural communities, reflect upon any assumptions you may be making and how you may best add value for the people there:

- What are you asking of the community and what are you providing?
- What works well for them?
- What is important to them?
- What do they want to make sure that their grandchildren and later generations will have?
- Are there any challenges preventing them from doing what they want?
- Do any community members have health-related expertise? Have they led past projects resulting in important insights? Can we partner with them?
- What questions do people in the community have about your research team and the resources and support that your team can offer?
- What effects will the completed project have on the community?
- How can the community sustain any positive project outcomes?

Make Use of Available Resources

Several free and accessible resources provide guidance on supporting engagement in rural communities, including:

- [A Guide to Supporting Engagement and Resiliency in Rural Communities](#), which suggests ways to support and plan projects in rural communities.
- The [Rural Health Information Hub: Modules in a Rural Community Health Toolkit](#), which shares ways to develop a rural health program.
- A [Virtual Community Engagement Guide](#), which provides tools for hosting online community engagement and meetings in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

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- The [Rural Community Engagement Resource Guide](#), which provides rural health care leaders with a variety of toolkits, strategies, and information to help initiate, improve, and inspire community engagement strategies that support value.

Note: This resource is a living document that was last updated and released in October 2023 and is expected to continue to evolve.