

Community Outreach Lessons Learned and Good Practices

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**The Ottawa
Neighbourhoods Social
Capital Forum**

**The Community
Development Framework**

and Effective Measures



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What is “community outreach”?

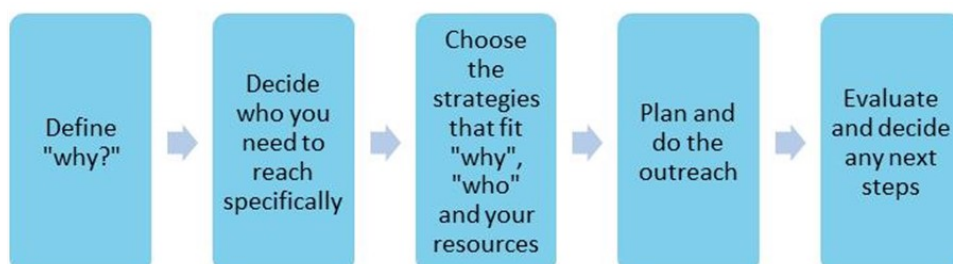
People use the word "outreach" to describe many different activities, from getting information to residents to actual delivery of services.¹

Outreach can be:

- part of a strategy to achieve something else (for example, to increase use of a service, to gather information or to improve safety in a neighbourhood), or
- the goal on its' own (for example, mental health outreach services in a building).

There are lots of different ways of doing outreach, from door-to-door strategies to community events groups or even to working strategically with one individual. No one strategy is best. How you do your outreach depends on what you want to accomplish.

Key steps:



Be clear on why you want to do outreach so you can choose the best approach.

Is the main goal of your outreach
to **inform**? or
to **consult**? or
to **get people involved**?

The strategies you use depend on your outreach goal.



Deciding “what would success look like?” is good practice and a great way to check that everyone involved agrees on the goal.

Different outreach approaches for different purposes

Outreach to INFORM (i.e. to “get the word out”)

“Getting the word” out is mainly one way communication so the information itself has to be very clear.

Good practices for this kind of outreach come from the communications and marketing fields;

- Figure out specifically what you want to inform people about (e.g. is it all programs? or one under-used program? ...)
- Decide who needs to know about this (e.g. the whole community? youth? parents of young children? seniors?...)
- Use the means of communication that your target group prefers (e.g. word of mouth, or social media, or written information, etc. or a combination. Do they rely on advice from one person such as a community leader or their children’s teacher?)
- Of course, if you use written information, use the appropriate literacy level and languages for your audience, and make it easy to understand, friendly and attractive

Common outreach methods to inform / get the word out are:

- Flyers, brochures or leaflets
- Word of mouth
- Door to door
- Up-to-date information on your website
- Social media
- Media release
- Mail (you can pay Canada Post to have a flyer delivered to specific postal codes)
- Posters
- Email distribution
- Phone trees
- Open houses, information fairs
- Notices in newsletters / local papers
- Announcements or information tables at events
- Visits arranged by other services (e.g. children in another recreation program come to your location for an activity)

Lessons Learned and Examples

People cannot participate in activities or programs they do not know about, so outreach to inform people about programs and events is good practice. However, research and experience tells us that people need to hear about something 3 to 7 times before they act.² If you want people to do something with the information (use a program, participate in an initiative or change a behaviour), you will likely have to use some of the outreach strategies for engaging people.

Word of mouth is the best source of referrals. Tapping into the word of mouth community networks plus door knocking, supported by good flyers, is a very effective way to get the word out. In the Strathcona Heights neighbourhood initiative, word was spread first through the homework club word of mouth network and then through the rest of the community in general.

The Carlington Neighbourhood Community Development project has used a “Knock and Talk Bag Drop” strategy, going door to door to drop off a bag of relevant community information at each unit and encourage participation.

For more help: “**Creating the Change We Want**” (part of the Community Development Framework and the Ottawa Neighbourhoods Social Capital Forum in partnership with City for All Women) offers a great workshop on “**Getting the Word Out**”. If you would like to hold this workshop with your group, contact Dominique at cdfccww@gmail.com.

Outreach to CONSULT

Outreach to consult with people (get their opinion) is two way communication, but the most important direction is from the community to you. An example would be finding out if residents are happy with a community service. Issues of trust, convenience and comfort are factors you will have to consider in this kind of outreach.

Good practices for this kind of outreach come from the fields of community based research and public engagement.

- Be clear and specific about whom you need to hear from.
- Be clear and specific about what you want to know from them.
For example, people who are not using your programs cannot tell you much about what's working or not in the programs except in a very general way. They can tell you why they are not using the programs.
- Use consultation methods that the people you want to hear from will be most comfortable with and which provide the opportunity for them to share their ideas.
For example:
 - If it's a door to door survey, will people take the time or feel comfortable? Will the person asking the questions speak their language or be someone they are comfortable with? If you're doing your outreach in the winter, will going door-to-door work in a townhouse development in bad weather?
 - In a community meeting, how do you make sure lots of people have the time to share their ideas – for example, small group discussions, visual displays they can fill in, etc.
 - For a satisfaction survey – will you get better answers if it is anonymous or not?

Common outreach methods for consulting (getting opinions) are:

- Surveys (can be with people when they are at a program or event, on-line, by phone, or door-to-door)
- Focus groups
- Public events or meetings
- Advisory committees
- A variety of participatory evaluation or research strategies

Lessons Learned and Examples

Even in small populations, sampling may be the best way to go. It can be difficult to reach everyone and it can be very time consuming.³

“Participation ... may often be challenged by a range of issues It is important that previous experiences of decisions being made by authorities without consultation...anxiety over possible conflicts experienced in community meetings or the dominance of representatives from previous community groups such as older white men or other ‘community elites’ may also require active management to achieve a broader representation....”⁴

One neighbourhood community development initiative held a community meeting to find out concerns and suggestions to improve safety. They noticed that some residents attending were not comfortable sharing their opinions in the meeting. They followed up with one-on-one discussions, and found that many community members had a different opinion than the majority of those in the meeting but they did not feel safe in the meeting to share their views.

If you would like some help to design your strategy for outreach to consult, contact your local community developer or the Effective Measures team at office@spcottawa.on.ca.

Outreach to ENGAGE (i.e. to get people to take some action—join a program, start to recycle...)

Getting people involved in a program or initiative requires on-going outreach which includes, but goes beyond, basic information outreach. Trust is an important factor.

Good practices for this kind of outreach come from the community development field:

- Use a mix of strategies
- Provide many different ways people can connect and get involved
- Make sure what you are inviting people to is inclusive and provides a range of supports to enable them to participate (childcare, transportation supports, accessible to diverse abilities, languages and cultures)
- Follow up ... follow-up ... follow-up
- Engagement involves understanding the existing concerns of community members. This means identifying what people have passion for, what they feel community issues are, and how interested they are in being involved. Basic questions here are "What are your concerns?", "How would you like your community to be?", "Would you like to be involved?"⁵
- Asking people how they would like to be involved and actively seeking alternative organisational arrangements and events that are fun and social will help people participate.⁶
- "Effective engagement means citizens are able to exert a reasonable amount of influence on a community decision, action, or process."⁷

Common outreach methods to engage people are :

- All the methods for "getting the word out"
- Community events like barbecues, winter festivals, Canada Day events, Eid and Christmas celebrations
- On-going drop-in type activities (monthly dinners, weekly craft groups, etc.)
- Using the credibility or reach of one program to outreach around other activities

Lessons Learned and Examples

Word of mouth from someone they trust (friends, neighbours, a trusted staff person) is most effective in getting people to participate. Use the word of mouth network and then concentrate on strategies most likely to convince those not connected into the word of mouth network.

Fun community events, activities with food and recreational programs for children provide great opportunities to connect with community members you may not meet otherwise. In particular, activities with food are one of the best ways to outreach for engagement (and can provide the opportunity to consult as well). Neighbourhoods have found that the Good Food Markets are great at getting lots of people out, including those who don't normally get involved.

The first three years of the Strathcona Heights community development project showed that community arts activities (specifically the Awesome Arts program) are of tremendous value for the participating youth and are one of the best community engagement tools for all segments of the population. The community was engaged and excited by the program, with a tremendous turn-out at the performances. It provided a great opportunity for local services to connect with families they otherwise did not see.

Some good practices for putting your outreach into action

- Decide which specific strategies are most likely to work for your goal, with your target population and are realistic within your resources (people, time and money)
- Ensure sufficient time to both effectively plan for engagement and to analyse results
- Have a plan around barriers – cultural barriers, mistrust, lack of confidence or skills among community members, lack of time.
- What is your staffing strategy for the outreach – paid people, volunteers, other organizations or a mix?
- Recruit and train according to the purpose of the outreach. If you are reaching out to youth, maybe you want to recruit youth for the outreach. Sometimes it's better to use people from the same group as those you mainly want to reach (eg. a similar age, language or whatever characteristics might be important to those you want to reach). Sometimes it's better that your outreach people not be from the same group (e.g. people may not want to speak to people in their community about what services they want.).
- Train the people who will do the outreach on the skills and sensitivities they will need. Also be clear on what “done” looks like.
- Consider who else could help. Can you work through existing channels (e.g. schools, clubs, other agencies, ethno-cultural groups, community leaders) to reach your desired audience?⁸
- If you have limited resources (people, time or money) consider a staged approach - expanding your outreach to different groups or in different ways over time.⁹ Start with what is most important to you or easiest.
- “When door knocking, it is important to consider time of day when people will be available including evenings and weekends. It may also be better to do your campaigning during the summer when it is brighter outside. The biggest drawback is safety.”¹⁰
- Be sure to evaluate if you accomplished what you wanted to. Did you move toward or reach your outreach goal? If so, what made it successful? If not, what could you do differently? What next steps do you want to take?
- Given the complexity of community life and differing social and housing environments there is no single solution that will suit all. This also highlights how important it is to ensure that communities identify their own agendas for capacity building rather than receiving instructions or aims that are parachuted in and which then may have little legitimacy or community ‘voice’ to back them “¹¹ (Atkinson and Willis, pg. 4).
- For more lessons learned and some ideas on how outreach has been used in different situations, check out the case studies from the Ottawa Neighbourhoods Social Capital Forum at www.onscf.ca/case-studies
- For more “how-to” ideas including different techniques to use in workshops, check out the “Creating the Change we Want” manual at www.cdfcdc.ca/creating-the-change-we-want-ccww/

References

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Additional Resources

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