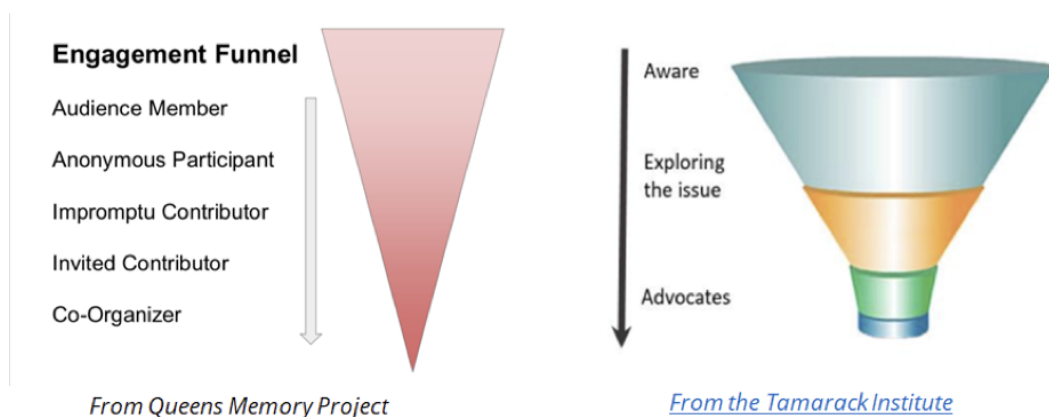# Building Community Engagement

WHO?

Think about the community group and how you want them to engage with your project.

1. Who are they? Describe them.
2. What do you want them to do with your organization or project? What is the "call to action"?
3. What is this group's current relationship with your organization or project? Where are they in the engagement funnel? (*see below*)
4. How does your community memory project benefit this group? Why should they care? What's the value for their community?
5. What challenges or barriers to engagement do they face and how will you address those?
6. What else do you need to learn about this group to facilitate new, more or better engagement?

WHAT LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT?

Reflect on the **engagement funnel** concept**.** Community members will have different levels of participation and different reasons to engage with your organization.

1. Consider where they are now on this continuum and where you would like them to be.
2. Think about how you might facilitate their movement along the funnel, and why you want to move them along the funnel.
3. Embrace a long-term view. Some groups will be ready to engage right away. Others may take longer, or the relationship may not pan out.
4. Offer lots of entry points and opportunities, continuously, and be open to different ways to work with and partner with people.

Engagement Funnel

Audience Member
Anonymous Participant
Impromptu Contributor
Invited Contributor
Co-Organizer

From Queens Memory Project

Aware

Exploring the issue

Advocates

From the Tamarack Institute

ENGAGING & BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

Be able to articulate the "why are we doing this project" pitch (*aka* your value prospect). Your audience should know why this project is important for their community. Tell a bit of the project story to help them understand the "why". Make it personal.

Remember the following "rules of engagement" when interacting with community members:

1. Introduce yourself authentically (not just your title, organization and/or credentials).
2. Always ask permission to engage with an individual or community group.
3. Reassure folks that you will protect and honor their legacy.
4. Share copies of any project outcomes and project updates with community members.
5. FOLLOW UP continually - these are never "one and done" interactions.

    Source: Dino Robinson, Shorefront Legacy Center

Always be building trust within the community. Make this your mantra. Remember that the community group controls their own story/narrative. Prioritize this ethos and make it part of your ongoing work.

Identify and activate your "street cred crew," folks who are already actively interacting with community groups and/or advocating for your organization or project. Consider inviting them to join your project, organization, Board or Friends groups.

Create a more inviting physical space for project staff and visitors. A "living room" area for patrons/visitors is a less intimidating, more personal and comfortable space that invites conversation and intimacy.

Create opportunities to meet folks and build relationships with different community groups within their actual community spaces. *Meet folks where they're at.*

Reach out to other community organizations and schools. Create mutually beneficial partnerships. Consider conducting a community mapping activity to identify potential partners. Aim for inclusivity and equity.

Always pose the question, "Who else should we talk to?" or "Do you know other people or organizations working on [topic]?" to continue building community.

Encourage multi-generational projects and relationships. Pair community youth and elders, invite new community groups to meet and work together in your organization's space.

Consider timing for project-related work or events and what times of day or days of the week work better for different community groups, e.g., after work for working people, earlier for older people, weekends for young parents, etc.

COMMUNICATION

Carefully consider which modes of communication you choose to reach different community groups. Don't overlook traditional mail, post cards, flyers, phone calls or even in-person visits as a preferred communication method. Likewise, email, social media messaging or other web-based methods may appeal to other groups.

Beware of surveys or other information-gathering methods or tools that potentially intimidate community members. Consider whether your tool or inquiry method conveys an uncomfortable power dynamic or assumes knowledge or aptitude using a tool.

Invite community members to contribute articles/content for your publications. Let their voice tell their story.

Use sound bites or digitized images from your project in outreach communications, to build interest and participation in the project.

Launch a mass mailing (email or snail mail) to share project details and ask folks to "*pass it on*" to others who might be interested.

Consider promoting your project or organization on a public Google or Facebook group related to your project topic or organization's work.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Represent your organization at other community events. Participate in fundraising, community clean up or community governance events. Demonstrate community connectedness through community participation.

Collect from the past **AND** the present. Reach out to folks currently engaged in community activities. Collect their stories as they are happening.

Tie digitization or story gathering efforts to key organization or community events or celebrations, for example, anniversary events (100th anniversary of building).

Take your show on the road. Some examples might include mobile digitization services within the community, hosting "scanning days" or a Story Corps-type activity to collect community members' content.

Think creatively about ways community members might participate in your project remotely. Ideas include transcription, indexing, and content description projects.

Make it fun! Participation should never be a burden or a chore. Think about offering incentives -- ice cream socials, free food or plants from a community garden, wine tasting. Invite folks to join you inside and outside!