



BRICKS AND MORTALS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Houses of worship have long been pillars of their wider communities; they provide space to worship and pray, but also often provide food for those in need, healthcare for the un- and under-insured, career help for the jobless, childcare, addiction recovery support, and many other services. As congregations embark on new projects to serve the community, it is important to understand what the wider community wants and needs. As you embark on this research, or “community engagement,” you might be surprised at what you find!

Community engagement can take many forms: surveys, workshops, mapping exercises, and more. Each engagement methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses, and here we provide resources to help you undertake community engagement processes with your congregation and the wider community.

Some congregations choose to undertake this process with a consultant, who can provide an outside set of eyes. Of course, not all congregations have the funds to hire a community engagement consultant. One benefit of a consultant is having an outside perspective on their community, and approach community engagement in an unbiased way.



INTRODUCTION



WHAT DOES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

There's no single way to undertake a community engagement process – most professionals will use multiple different methods.

SURVEYS A survey is a research instrument where participants (members of your congregation and the wider community) individually answer questions, usually through an online portal, but sometimes on paper or through an in-person interviewer. Surveys can be a good tool to gather feedback from many different people in your community, but don't provide many opportunities for deeper discussion.

Check out this resource to learn more about designing surveys: [How to Create a Community Engagement Survey](#)

FOCUS GROUPS Focus groups provide an opportunity for deeper discussion. In a focus group, community members come together to have a moderated discussion about a topic. A focus group for your congregation might include diverse community members from across your neighborhood discussing what programs would benefit them and what programs are currently lacking in your area. Focus groups can provide a lot of insight, especially as the back and forth amongst community members can lead to a deeper understanding of the issues neighborhood residents face.

Here are some tips on creating a focus group: [Urban Institute: Focus Groups](#)

DESIGN CHARETTES In a design charrette, members of your community work together with professional architects, urban planners, and designers to create a design and/or implementation plan for a site. (The design charrette model relies on collaborating with these professionals; it is not a model that congregations can take on alone.) Over a short time period – usually 4 to 7 days, the professionals will work with community members to assess their vision, priorities, and values, and build these into more concrete plans for a project.

Here are some resources to create a design charrette: [What is a Design Charrette?](#) & [Involve: Design Charettes](#)

ASSET MAPPING Community Asset Mapping is a process by which you can understand the resources that exist in your community. In small groups, community members identify the organizations, individuals, and institutions that serve the community's needs. Oftentimes, this exercise will focus on a specific topic, like access to fresh food or healthcare. Community asset mapping often ends in the form of a geographic map, but also might end up looking like a list or database.

When paired with Surveys or Focus Groups to find out the needs and desires of your community, this mapping can help your congregation decide what program to develop by discovering that services do - or do not - exist nearby.

Here are some tips for creating an asset map: [Center for Court Innovation: Introduction to Community Asset Mapping](#) & [Tamarack Institute: Asset Mapping: Finding the Strength in Your Neighborhood](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the method-specific resources above, check out these helpful general resources on designing a community engagement process.

[Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement](#)

[Community Engaged Surveys: From Research Design to Analysis and Dissemination](#)

[Involve.org.uk](#)

