



GO Neighborhoods, where Great Opportunities grow

Comparing Outreach and Engagement

In work at the neighborhood level, there has been a long tradition of outreach by community organizers, intermediaries, and agencies interested in involving residents and other community based stakeholders in the process of community development. There are many cases where outreach is effective, but not sufficient in creating authentic engagement and supporting comprehensive community development.

The “people infrastructure” of a neighborhood is a powerful force. A neighborhood that has community cohesion is one that builds power and can leverage that in absence of other types of power. While each approach has a use based on the situation and needs, outreach does not help build up the “people infrastructure” of a neighborhood and stakeholders should not expect that it will.

As leaders trained in an inclusive philosophy, we need the skills to identify and distinguish one approach over the other, and to be mindful of opportunities to advocate in this way. As trainers interested in sharing this philosophy, we are committed to modeling the qualities that lead toward inclusive engagement.

The following chart outlines some key comparisons between outreach and engagement approaches. These are general comparisons and do not always play out so dramatically; it is critical to understand where each is an important tool depending upon the situation. As always, much of the success of either approach is dependent on the person/team involved.

	<i>Outreach</i>	<i>Engagement</i>
Theme	Input/Information Sharing	Inclusion
Philosophy	Hearing from others to inform my/our plan	Talking with others to craft a collective vision and plan
Application	Opinions produce data to inform a strategy or program	Ideas promote shared ownership for vision and action
Orientation	Short-term feedback	Long-term relationship
Conditions of Success	Success marked by diversity & volume of inputs	Success marked by depth of relationship
Expertise	“Experts” as experts (and about providing information for experts)	Everyone has expertise that adds value (from community members to technical knowledge)
Tools	Flyers, interviews and surveys	Relational conversations and interactive opportunities
Structure	Feedback to a central person or place	“Web” of connections that creates multiple interactions
Meeting Feeling (and Format Example)	Mostly talking at/to (e.g. public comment at a commission or council meeting)	Mostly listening and dialogue (e.g. sharing stories, brainstorming, and coming to agreement)
Leadership Strategy	Key support from community leaders/gatekeepers	Everyone is a leader/has a role to play
Long-term results	Continued community outreach “interventions”	Cultivate community capacity
Relationship	Transactional	Transformational