

Community Engagement in Response to COVID-19

During and after a crisis, many people have a deep desire to engage in volunteer relief efforts. While this desire comes from a good place, there are important considerations that precede action to ensure that unintended consequences and doing harm are avoided. In times like these, people can often place their need to ‘do something’ above the needs that the community is voicing. Listening to what trusted community leaders are asking for should come first. We also need to develop the self-awareness to consider our particular role in response to the crisis. This requires pause and reflection before action. This includes considering what resources and community organizations already exist to do the work and how you can bolster existing efforts.

Below is a brief reflection guide as you seek out ways to engage in relief efforts. This is adapted from our guiding framework for community engagement and considers the community impact of COVID-19, which is affecting people differently across class, ability, race, geographic location, and other social identities. This is not exhaustive, and we recognize there are considerations that may not be present. However, we hope it can be a useful tool for your engagement.

Inquiry

We believe that humility, intellectual curiosity, and reasoning form the foundation of informed and responsible civic engagement.

- Am I entering into virtual and physical spaces with a learning mindset? Am I viewing community members as experts in their own lives and own needs?
- How am I creating space for reflection on my choices and actions?
- Am I taking time to consider and learn how a community organization’s resources (financial, human, and time) may have been impacted by COVID-19?

Empathy

We believe that seeking and considering multiple perspectives transforms how individuals and communities engage with one another.

- How are the challenges of COVID-19 affecting people across different communities in St. Louis and around the world?
- As I consider community engagement, am I thinking about my own safety and the safety of those who are most vulnerable?
- What steps am I taking to minimize harm?

Collaboration

We believe that partnerships are most impactful when rooted in shared goals and decision-making.

- Am I clear about my capacity right now? Is what I am promising to do something that I can follow through on in the short and long-term?
- Is what I am offering a response to a community partner's need or am I prioritizing my need?
- Am I clear on the skills that I have to offer and aware that they may or may not be needed in this moment?

Integrity

We believe that upholding ethical behavior, respecting others, and honoring commitments are cornerstones of trusting and reciprocal partnerships.

- Are there clear deadlines that have been established for the project and am I following through on my commitments?
- Have I taken time to check-in with my community partner? Have I established regular check-ins that are mindful of current circumstances?
- Am I prepared to shift plans based on the changing needs of the community including stepping away if asked?
- Am I aware of my self-interest and am I genuinely committed to community needs?

Equity

We believe that effective civic engagement foster access, opportunity, and dignity for all, and addresses structural and power imbalances.

- Am I noting and leveraging my privileges as they relate to COVID-19?
- Am I aware of the disproportionate ways COVID-19 is affecting communities based on social identities (particularly ability, class, and race)?
- Are my efforts responding to current power inequities?
- What potential systems are interconnected with this area of action? How can I be aware of that in my action?

Action

We believe that effective civic engagement is an active process requiring courage, dedication, and participation.

- Have I chosen an action to take that is needed, relevant, and beneficial to the community?
- Have I evaluated and been honest about my own emotional and physical capacity to engage?
- Have I considered the sustainability of this current work and the impact if I'm unable to continue?

Connect with Us!

The Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement is available as a resource. E-mail or schedule a zoom call with us today!

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