

Community Engagement – an essential part of our new work

Engaging and inspiring communities to create a shared vision for the future and set goals for collective action

Community engagement is those activities we use to identify how the community feels about our work, get advice on our strategies and tactics, and develop the community will to solve Dane County's most important problems.

Prior to our transformation to an organization focused explicitly on creating a lasting impact, there was little need for community engagement beyond the recruitment of volunteers for committee and campaign work. Our Schools of Hope work changed that. Beginning with a Leadership Team in 1995, it involved hundreds of people in the design of our tutoring project and thousands of people in its work. It modeled the importance of having media partners to communicate the problems of academic achievement to the community, and demonstrated a new way of galvanizing volunteers for the work.

The Committee on Focusing Resources used the same Leadership Team approach to determine how United Way would create an impact overall. Hundreds of people – volunteers and community members – helped us determine, through community engagement activities, the most important problems that needed local solutions. This became the Agenda for Change.

Creating public will for change through Community Engagement

We've learned that through engagement, we provide an educational opportunity to help the public understand the scope and dimension of the issues facing our community. We have found that authentic engagement with the ability to convey a sense of possibility helps members of the community to see things differently, see how strategies fit together, and discover how things can change. Engagement develops a community will for change.

“Authentic community engagement is as vitally important to solving the community's problems as market research is to the food industry. Engaging the community in our strategies is key to helping decision-makers understand the broader community and provide relevant strategies.”

—Rick Searer, EVP and President of Kraft North America Commercial

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Our history with Community Engagement

We performed a variety of community engagement activities prior to our transition to an impact model. We began over 10 years ago training employees at General Casualty to read to small children for Start Smart Dane County.

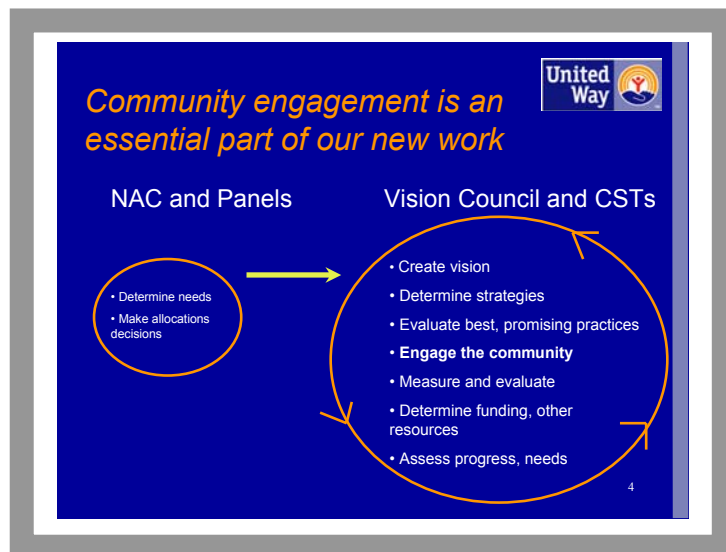
We've used Community Engagement in a variety of ways in recent years including:

- Civic Progress group (business leaders) bus tours of at-risk neighborhoods
- Community conversations on housing and community reintegration of the formerly incarcerated
- Housing in Action Leadership Team, which developed 4 strategies to reduce homelessness
- A design lab on our Building Bridges strategy between landlords and tenants, which developed the landlord strategy for financial education
- The Case Management Symposium, which gave us valuable information to help the community improve case management
- Incorporating in all speeches, classes, and meetings with community groups a mechanism to solicit responses and feedback to guide our work
- Schools of Hope, which now has leadership teams in Sun Prairie and Verona that have been instrumental in developing wider volunteerism in these communities
- A new survey tool that allowed us to email to a target list while getting a broad response, including by a link on our website. Our May 2006 survey on caregiving drew 818 responses and prioritized ways we will support caregivers.

Prior to our transformation to impact, our Needs Allocations Committee and its panels only considered needs we saw in the community and

Our objectives for Community Engagement

1. Get feedback, or advice, from the community to inform our work.
2. Help us understand, or shape, public will and consensus.
3. Educate the community
4. Garner support for our work.



made allocations decisions based on proposals from agencies. Now we're asking our Vision Council and its Community Solutions Team members to use Community Engagement as a tool in their work.

This makes the role of the Teams even more critical as they are now creating and developing their visions, evaluating research strategies and tactics, measuring progress, and determining funding and other resources.

This work is important, but it isn't easy.

Learnings from the Latino Advisory Delegation

The Latino Advisory Delegation (LAD – a short-term leadership team) and their design of Cuéntame to solicit broad input gave us the opportunity to pilot other forms of Community Engagement. Cuéntame was the framework for 5 radio call-in shows, a data discussion with LaSup (Latino Support Network), and a listening session with 200+ Latinos at the Catholic Multicultural Center.

We learned:

- Even though the LAD were all members of the Latino community, and many of them serve the Latino community, they wanted to ensure their recommendations created from the data we assembled and their experiences were supplemented by input from the broader Latino community. They came away from the process with new insights, greater perspective and actual surprises.

- Radio is a strong tool to engage people who have limited time to attend an event. We found we could talk to people who called from work.
- Leadership volunteers saw the value of involving themselves and spending time educating and listening to the community.

Why this matters

We believe community engagement will:

1. Help the community better understand and get agreement on the scope and dimension of the issues we're facing as a community and recognize potential solutions
2. Help our volunteers make better decisions on resources
3. Build community by involving more people and galvanize more volunteers to create a heightened sense of ownership and responsibility for the community's work
4. Recognize the important work of our partners
5. Enhance our effectiveness as a convener, leader, or community partner
6. Create year-round presence and recognition for United Way, allowing us to ask for help in a variety of ways, not just money.
7. Harness the power of change by deepening and broadening the number of people who get invested in this work.

A variety of techniques to engage

- One-on-one contacts
- Public meetings, hearings
- Open house/availability booth at other community events
- Focus groups
- Radio feedback
- Email feedback
- Interactive technology, e.g. online surveys
- Advice-giving groups, short or long-term
- Consensus-based decisions-making group
- Conferences, workshops, symposiums

These techniques are valuable when used with a variety of group processes that enable rich conversation and bring people to consensus.

How we will measure Community Engagement

We already use a variety of feedback tools and evaluations for our activities. Among other measures, we will report our activities with:

1. Number of intentional community engagement events
2. Number of people engaged, which may include those who participate, attend, or respond
3. DaneTrak responses to the questions on
 - Top of mind awareness
 - Types of attitude

Objectives determine level of impact, and choice of technique

Level of impact	Objective	Examples
Empower	Place final decision-making in hands of the public	Community Solutions Teams, By Youth for Youth
Collaborate	Seek advice and formulate solutions together	Leadership Teams, design lab
Involve	Insure concerns are understood	Community Conversations
Consult	Public informed, listened to, and provide feedback on how your input influenced decision	Listening sessions, radio call-in shows, data discussions, board discussions focus groups
Inform	Educate public	Speeches, press releases, website

Increasing level of public impact

