

Community Engagement & Events

Spirit & Place encourages you to incorporate community engagement activities into your event planning.

Community engagement will help you:	Doing this work well requires you to be:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust • Center the voices and experiences of others • Awaken to new & different perspectives • Make real impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People-centered • Adaptable & flexible • Willing to share authority, power, and privilege • Committed to the “long haul”

What does it mean to be “people-centered?”

Being people-centered requires a shift in perspective from “outreach” (which assumes a centralized source and a target) to “community engagement” (which embraces reciprocal and ongoing relationships that build trust). One way to think of this is that “outreach” is about going out into the community. “Community engagement” goes a step further and invites the community in and asks the question: “How do we build ‘this’ together?” In this model, time is the most critical investment to successfully build effective, collaborative relationships and programs. Being present at crucial community conversations is important, as well as listening without expectation or agenda.

Why is adaptability and flexibility crucial?

All organizations and people have “ways of doing things.” Unfortunately, inflexibility can be harmful. For example, a large institution’s adherence to internally driven deadlines that fail to honor the rhythms of a community (e.g. setting a youth program’s registration deadline for the first week of school because that’s the start of a new quarter) can cause more harm than good (e.g., rushed deadlines increase stress for parents and teachers). When working with – not *for* – communities, flexibility and adaptability are key in building stronger and longer-lasting relationships.

Shared Authority.

Sharing authority builds trust and overall capacity to get things done. Weaving together of new relationships built on mutual support leads to exciting opportunities for fresh voices to emerge and for new ways of seeing and doing to occur. It may also mean using your (individual or institutional) access to resources and networks to support the work of others, as well as to center and uplift different voices, desires, and approaches.

This all takes time!

People-centered community engagement is a means, not an end. It solidifies links between people, organizations, and the places they call home, but it never becomes a box to check off a “to do” list.

Partnerships & Community Engagement

Memorable and meaningful events are often collaborative. Bringing in different perspectives in the early stages of designing an event can yield fresh approaches and unique format strategies. Always remember collaborative partnerships are built on honesty and authenticity. This takes time and requires open dialogue.

Potential Partners	What are your assumptions about why they'd be a good partner? <i>Verify these assumptions before misunderstanding occur!</i>

Community engagement begins with showing up.

- Read local news sources to find out who is doing what around Central Indiana.
- Sign up for e-newsletters that cover topics outside your work/school/congregational worlds.
- **GO TO EVENTS.** Sounds obvious, but this is the best advice possible.
 - Attend events like yours or sponsored by groups with a similar mission.
 - Attend events *unlike* yours and hosted by groups with a different mission, but similar values.
 - Go to events that attract a diversity of audiences and/or occur in different parts of town.
- Introduce yourself to the event organizers.
- Grab a cup of coffee or lunch and get to know one another on a human level.
- Repeat as needed.

Partnerships are relationships – invest the time!