

# UrbanTrends

A quarterly newsletter published by



## Community Engagement 101

**Reciprocity** **Access**

**Building Capacity** **Credibility**

**Improving Health Outcomes**

Linkages to Services Cost-Effective

**Building Trust** *Community as a Channel*

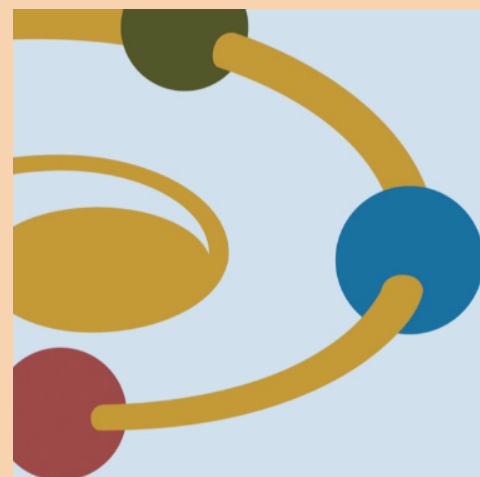
**Countering Health Disparities**

Culturally-Relevant **Inclusion** **Promoting Resiliency**

**Authenticity**

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# A Letter From the President

*Ivan Juzang, Founder & President of MEE Productions Inc.*

MEE Productions Inc. is a health communications firm that develops and implements behavioral health interventions that “move the numbers” in communities with the highest health disparities – primarily low-income, urban and Black and Latino communities.

Community outreach & partnership development are critical, core elements of MEE’s approach to making change. Every project we do has a community engagement component to it — we value and prioritize it.

Community leaders, influencers and community-based organizations, like childcare centers, barbershops, hair salons, churches and other non-profits, are valuable resources that MEE authentically engages to disseminate information and promote behavior-health messages. But gaining authentic access to these gatekeepers is the key first step in that process.

How have we consistently been able to engage and mobilize underserved communities in an ethical and responsible way? How do we build trust with suspicious audiences? What does community engagement really require, beyond being trauma-informed?

People ask us all the time, “What makes your community engagement tactics different from others in public health? Clearly, they produce results. But how do you do it?” Of course, “how” is an important piece of the puzzle. But it’s important to understand the “why” before the “how.”

If you understand “the why,” you’re empowered to execute the processes correctly and maintain fidelity of our proven community engagement model. You’ll see the promise and possibilities of making a positive, long-term impact. You will execute each step in the appropriate order and take the entire process seriously.

You’ll have the motivation to stick with it through the challenges you will inevitably face working in communities that have been let down or taken advantage of so many times before.

The “win-win” scenarios we present in this issue provide insights into the “why.” MEE is about creating wins from both the community perspective and our client’s. That’s what leads to stronger, more vibrant and resilient communities.



Are you *truly* engaged with the communities you serve?

# The Win-Win of Community Engagement

## *Repairing Trust to Strengthen the Community While Achieving Your Goals*

Over the years, MEE has developed a community engagement model that delivers wins on three sequential levels: 1) an operational win; 2) a socially responsible win; and 3) a strategic capacity-building win. MEE's Win-Win infographic on the next page illustrates how everyone wins when the community is engaged with respect and consistency.

### Operational Level

The first win is that you create a communications channel in the form of a Community Network. When we typically think of communications channels, we think about transit ads, television ads, radio ads, billboards and even social media. But, a network of CBOs and community leaders is the best channel you can use to put public health information into communities. By developing this communications channel, you can not only put information into the community, but you can also take information out.

At the same time we are using the Community Network as a communications channel, the CBOs and community leaders that comprise the Network have started creating referrals and networking amongst each other, creating a sense of social fabric. So, building a Community Network is protective for the community in and of itself.

Develop your own Community Network as a culturally relevant communications channel that builds trust so you can positively impact health and social outcomes in your community.

### Socially-Responsible Level

Community engagement is the socially-responsible thing to do. One of the things many people do not understand is that many of the communities we work in are dealing with chronic trauma based on the structural social determinants of health (disparities).

If we are not actually helping communities understand how to deal with chronic stress and high doses of trauma, then we are just going there, getting our work done (our win) and then leaving. That's not responsible. That is why no matter what MEE's intervention is, we include having "urban trauma conversations" so we can start discussing what's been happening in these communities. By doing that, we are starting to promote resiliency and linking people to services in their community.

As a result, we get our win, but at the same time the community wins because we have started to address the social determinants of health and started mobilizing social fabric in the community.

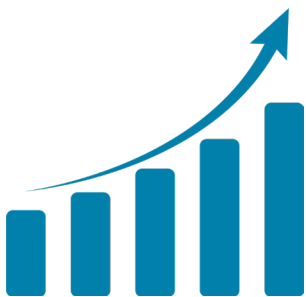
Use your Community Network to facilitate the kind of Community Dialogue that can counter urban trauma and tap into the innate resiliency of its residents.

### Capacity-Building Level

Reduction of funding in the public health sector is a fact. Public funding for the primary prevention of public health issues impacting low-income communities is almost non-existent. But the reduction in funding is not just impacting healthcare and other provider organizations, it is impacting the community as well. As a result, MEE is convinced more than ever that organizations must conduct effective community engagement in order to start putting skills into the community.

What kind of skills specifically? Primary prevention capacity building skills for promoting resiliency. We need to help the community understand how to have primary prevention skills (protective factors) around public health and mental health.

Use your Community Network to build capacity and ensure long-term ability to fight health disparities by transferring skills to CBOs, non-profits and community members who can lead the efforts even when funding is scarce or non-existent.



# The Win-Win of Community Engagement

Health Organization Win		Community Win
<p>A Culturally-Relevant Communications Channel that Builds Trust in Order to Positively Impact Health Outcomes</p>  <p>Put information into the community... Take information out of the community</p>	<p>An Operational Win</p> 	<p>Increasing Access to Quality, Respectful Healthcare Treatment While Increasing Connectedness to Community-Based Services</p>  <p>Engagement is automatically PROTECTIVE because it fosters access to services and connectedness (social fabric) in the community!</p>
<p>An Ethical and Responsible Approach to Counter Health Disparities by Promoting Resiliency</p>  <p>Having trusted community partners enables grassroots advocacy to address underlying health disparities and promote resiliency</p>	<p>A Socially Responsible Win</p> 	<p>Facilitate Community Dialogue to Counter Urban Trauma and Tap into Innate Resiliency</p>  <p>Addresses the community's daily realities and chronic stressors while linking to trauma-informed services</p>
<p>The Most Effective Method to Promote Primary Prevention in Communities with the Highest Health Disparities</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>It is Easier to Build Strong Children Than to Repair Broken Men.</i> - Frederick Douglass</p> </div> <p>The most cost-effective way for public health to put needed "upstream" primary prevention skills into the community</p>	<p>A Capacity Building Win</p> 	<p>Build Capacity by Transferring Skills into the Community to Prevent Chronic Disease and Increase Wellness</p>  <p>Putting primary prevention and protective factor skills back into the community</p>

## Getting in the Right Mindset

### What Effective Community Engagement Requires from Your Organization

Community engagement is labor-intensive work that requires listening, not just talking; patience; and determination.

You need to have a mindset built on an openness to personal and professional growth, no matter how long you have been working in your chosen field. A fixed mindset, where you are closed to new ideas or ways of doing things, will hamper, if not doom, your efforts to engage with and serve community members facing the highest social and health disparities.

Boots-on-the-ground community engagement requires more time and effort than using media-based strategies to reach your audience. While it may be perceived as the “harder” route, it offers an exceptional “bang for the buck” that more than justifies your investment. Turning around community norms can’t happen overnight. If you really intend to be effective at community engagement, you must be willing to:

#### **Engage the target audience and the community on its terms, not yours.**

- This means you have to be comfortable working differently, and maybe even harder.
- Meet people where they are, physically and in spirit. Don’t make members of the community only come to your space when you want to engage. Go to them, and hold intimate, small-group sessions in their trusted, familiar places, where they feel comfortable and welcomed.

#### **Be challenged by community members who attend your events or activities by making time to listen when people need to vent about past disappointments, current perceived slights and undelivered promises.**

- People will say, “Who sent you?” “Who’s funding you?” or “I remember what happened last time. What are you up to this time?” This is the community’s way of understanding your intentions and assessing this potential relationship. People want to be assured that you’re working in their best interest and plan to be there for the long term.
- Hear the community’s word-on-the-street and residents’ assessment about your organization and the people who serve as its “face.”

#### **Tell the truth, even when it feels uncomfortable or paints you or your organization in a less-than-flattering light.**

- Acknowledge when you don’t know something and commit to finding the answer and circling back to share it. Just be sure to follow through on that commitment, along with others you make.

#### **Acknowledge imperfections and admit the reality of institutional trauma.**

- People with the fewest resources have often been mistreated by both individuals and institutions, leading to trauma and other damage. It’s OK to admit that things have not always been done right, by you or by others.

#### **Make changes within your organization based on feedback from the people you serve.**

- Once the grassroots community really starts coming through your organization’s doors, ask them for honest feedback on their experiences. Did they feel welcomed upon entering? Were they treated with respect? Did they get the feeling that the staff really doesn’t want to be there or has issues with them? Did they feel discriminated against based on their race, gender presentation, sexual history, or socioeconomic status?
- Do an audit of your human resource assets. Be willing to make staff changes to reflect the vision of a community-centered, trauma-informed approach. Reflect the diversity present in your community.

#### **Become an ongoing community presence that people can depend on. This means making a real commitment to being there and making positive change.**

- A fully-funded, multi-year commitment shows that you are not going to pick up and run or abandon efforts to build trusting relationships at the grassroots level.

## Seven Benefits of Community Engagement

1. You create the best communications channel, which provides on-going, long-term and credible access to your community.
2. Community engagement opens a real, two-way working relationship with communities – you can easily both gather up-to-date, ground-level data (take info out) and disseminate your health messages (put info in).
3. Once an effective community infrastructure is in place, it can be used multiple times, for multiple important topics as they arise. Not only will you be “allowed” to return, the community will actively invite you back to continue the conversation.
4. Community Engagement is a very cost-effective communications method, much less expensive than using traditional media outlets.
5. Community Engagement is inherently culturally-relevant and participatory, because to be successful, you must interact and dialogue with residents in their own language and style.
6. Ongoing dialogue with the community helps create reciprocity and a shared vision that begins the process of repairing broken or fragile trust.
7. Listening to people’s barriers and then providing realistic and credible counter-arguments gives them the information they need to do the personal “cost-benefit analysis” we all process before changing our behaviors.

## The “How” of Community Engagement

### Tactics for Building Trusting Relationships

MEE has implemented a variety of community-engagement and mobilization tactics over the years.

- Community-Participatory Audience Research
- Community Advisory Boards
- Community Coalitions
- Community Surveys
- Participant Recruitment (Consent) for Clinical Trials
- “Chat & Chew” Information Sessions with CBOs/Non-Profits
- Targeted Community Canvassing (Outreach)
- Digital Relationship Management (Database)
- Peer-to-Peer Community Education

## Check Out Our Case Studies of The “How” of Community Engagement at [www.MEEProductions.com/Academic-Case-Studies](http://www.MEEProductions.com/Academic-Case-Studies)

<p><b>Project EMPaCT: Prostate Cancer Awareness for African-American Men</b> Supporting a Research Study by Thomas Jefferson University</p> <p>MEE conducted audience research, developed educational materials and recruited peer educators for this pilot study of a neighborhood-based intervention to reduce disparities in prostate cancer affecting Black men in Philadelphia. It leveraged its extensive Community Network to support recruitment efforts and worked with community-based organizations to identify potential peer educators to deliver a culturally specific curriculum in small-group settings.</p>	<p><b>Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Youth Violence Prevention Campaign</b> A 3-Year, City-Wide Campaign to Reduce and Prevent Youth Violence</p> <p>MEE implemented an innovative public health approach to reducing urban youth violence in Philadelphia. It included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio/TV Advertising</li> <li>• Grassroots, peer-to-peer outreach, using MEE’s CATs (Jobs/Mentor) Model</li> <li>• Active partnerships with community-based organizations</li> </ul> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Adult Mentoring</li> <li>• Youth Development (Life Skills)</li> <li>• Self-Efficacy &amp; Leadership</li> </ul>	<p><b>Black Males Engaged and Empowered (B-MEE) - Scattergood Foundation</b> Community Outreach to Overcome Stigmas Associated with Discussing Mental Health Among Black Males</p> <p>Using MEE’s trauma-informed CATs Model, this pilot project trained/managed a team of 20 young Black males ages 17-21 to conduct peer-level community outreach in zip codes that had the lowest rates of usage of the behavioral health services.</p>	<p><b>MEE’s Models for Engaging Communities Around Youth Violence</b> Community-Tested and Evidence-Informed Models to Reduce Youth Violence in Chicago</p> <p>MEE implemented two of its peer models (CATs &amp; PLAN) that increase positive coping behaviors among low-income youth and surround them with protective factors including a stronger safety net of community adults. CATs provided jobs plus mentoring and social/emotional skills for 1,500 youth in Chicago neighborhoods with the highest rates of poverty, violent crime, domestic distress and youth disconnected from their schools or community.</p>
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