



## Effectively Collaborating with Community Organizations

### *A Guide for Medical Professionals*



tubmanhealth.org

### Why work with community organizations?

- Community knows community members best.
- Public health interventions work best when they are rooted in community interests, needs, and values.
- Community organizations are the key to addressing and centering the needs of the communities they serve, and can play a key role in improving patient empowerment, access, and health outcomes.
- Recognize that racism, sexism, homophobia, and aporophobia are all deeply engrained into systems community members interact with, including ones you are part of. Working in collaboration with community groups means tackling this head-on. The failure to challenge these isms in our systems and standard operating procedures perpetuates them.



**Community-directed is the way to go!**  
**Where does your work fall on this Community Engagement Scale?**

### Community Engagement Scale

**Community informed**

*Community as adviser*

**Community involved**

*Community as collaborator*

**Community directed**

*Community as leader*

*Greater Community Engagement*



### Tips for effective collaboration:

#### **Analyze your positionality.**

- Before stepping into a space, be aware of the physical, mental, and emotional space you are taking. Reflect on how your positionality may impact patients' perceptions of you, and vice-versa.

#### **Take a step back, listen, and learn/unlearn.**

- Empower community members by recognizing they are the expert on their own experiences, body, feelings, and life.
- Breakdown power dynamics and take a step back to make room for community to take the lead.
- Remember that your role is not to teach, but rather to learn. Community is the expert, so have a mindset of collaboration and learning.
- Be okay with being uncomfortable. Unlearning the status quo takes practice. Be open to trying new ways of interacting with patients and creating new experiences.

#### **Ask questions, respectfully.**

- If you have any clarifying questions, community organizations likely welcome them, as long as they come from a place of curiosity rather than doubt.

#### **Prioritize relationship-building.**

- Relationships are essential to survival for communities marginalized by mainstream medicine. Trying to get to know patients on a deeper level helps build trust.
- Recognize that many patients have had negative experiences in the mainstream medical system, so building trust will take time.

#### **Reflect.**

- Take a moment to reflect on the things you've learned after collaboration and think about the ways you can incorporate community's best practices into your daily work.



*Pictured above: Tubman Health staff post for a picture with clinical partners for one of our Blaxinate COVID-19 Vaccine Lounges.*

### **Program Spotlight: Blaxinate!**

- Tubman Health's Blaxinate COVID-19 Vaccine Lounges were an example of community-led work in partnership with mainstream medical providers.
- Providers took a back-seat role by allowing community to take the lead in creating unique VIP vaccine experiences.
- Members of the community were vaccine lounge attendees, with the role of having conversations, providing culturally-relevant scientific information, and improving patient comfort. Providers came in when directed by lounge attendees, only to administer the vaccine.
- Providers were open to new ways of doing things, such as:
  - Limiting paperwork
  - Making space to include providers from the community that was being tended to
  - Hiding the sharps container
  - Incorporating culturally relevant care tactics/modalities during and after care
  - Reducing requests made of the patient
  - Moving around the patient rather than asking the patient to move around
  - Substituting handouts and materials for ones that were preferred by the community being served
  - Allowing community lounge attendees to be the main communicators and advocates for the patients.



***"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."***

***- Lilla Watson***