



Video Transcript: Ask Me Anything: Community Engagement

Chris (00:00): This project gives us the resources and the information and the support to spend the necessary time and community to build relationships, to participate on coalitions, and to be there to support the community providers that we hope to build long lasting relationships with. Ask Me Anything: Community Engagement. Hi, I'm Chris Cole from Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, and today I'm going to let the RHNTC ask me anything about community engagement.

Chris (00:30): What does a typical day look like for you when you're focused on community engagement? I myself am not doing as much community engagement work as I used to, as I supervise a team of educators. I let our staff know that they have our organization's support to just spend time in community, stressing to them that they can't go just cold-knock on the door of a community organization that they want to partner with. These are relationships that need to be built, there needs to be trust, there needs to be an understanding of these organizations and the youth they serve. So letting my staff know that spending time helping to support those organizations, showing up at community resource fairs, visiting them regularly to drop off sexual and reproductive health information, being able to participate on any coalitions that were asked that we have the capacity to do. Tell us about the first time you really felt like you made a meaningful connection with a community member through your project. There have been so many of them. One of the more recent surprising ones was delivering condoms to a local business, and it happened to be a person that was working at that business—it was a hair salon—and had no idea that this person had all these other community connections and just started conversation up with them as we were dropping off condoms and they were like, “hey, I have this sort of small young, youth group that I'm working with on a volunteer basis.” They had no idea about all the resources that we had. We had no idea about all the connections they had. Having conversation with the community member that wasn't necessarily linked to any other community partner that we knew have opened up so much programming for us. It reinforced for myself and staff that all that time spent in community, just having conversations, really builds into bigger partnerships.

Chris (02:20): What is the best advice you've ever received about community engagement? Listen [laughs]. Listen to the folks in community. Listen to their lived experience. Listen to what they need and want rather than walking in and telling them what they need and want. Working hard to partner and provide resources to those folks so that they can do the work themselves. It's not always important that we be the ones doing the sexual and reproductive health education work. We can work with partners so that they can deliver the work to their communities. So they can deliver to the youth and the parents that they work with, because then the work becomes sustainable. That's why the capacity building and the sustainability is so important, so listening to communities, listening to what resources they already have, what they need, and enabling them to do the work alongside you, learn, and then continue the work if and when we can't be there.

Chris (03:17): What are your top three approaches to mobilizing community resources to align with your project goals? First and foremost, I think it's the community mapping or the community scan to know what is out there, especially for those of us that have been doing the work for a while, we can make the mistake of having our go-to organizations and our go-to partners, and we don't take the time to learn about new partners out there, people offering new and creative ways to reach communities, to teach youth. After that, it is then the community time of getting to know those other partners, learning more about the services and connecting them. It doesn't always have to be us involved.

Chris (03:57): Sometimes we are connecting one community partner to another because they are able to get the work done without us. They just needed the connection. And again, I think the other approach is being there and putting in the time.

Chris (04:14): What tips do you have for other projects looking to catalyze policy, program, or practice change in their community? I always feel like the policy is the tough part of that question. Policies take organizational support to change. Sometimes it's the people doing the work, the people managing the work that have these ideas about policy, and it is really engaging your organization as a whole. So those stakeholders, the admins at the organization, need to be in the room hearing the messaging and the community work that's going on so that they can facilitate policy change that will enable them to best serve youth.

Chris (04:53): What is the best part of working on your project? I'm going to say it's the community aspect of it. I feel like this project allows more space for us as an organization to spend the necessary time and community needed to build those relationships and partnerships that enable us to do the work. This video was created by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC.