

Engaging Diverse Audiences in the Sustainable Neighborhoods Program: A Best Practices Guide

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City of Boulder Community Connector Program

Community Connectors are trusted voices within their own communities and help to strengthen the relationship between historically underrepresented communities and city government. As community members with lived experience, they partner with the city to co-design engagement opportunities, share resources and different opportunities, elevate historically underrepresented voices, and surface arising issues or community concerns. Boulder's Community Connectors receive a stipend for their expertise, commitment, bi-cultural/bi-lingual skills, and their time.

Program elements and keys to success

- **Center equity:** Recognizing the historic marginalization of many community members; intentionally elevating their participation, voices, and lived experience in programming and engagement.
- **Meet people where they are:** Understanding where people are - emotionally, physically, and psychologically; making participation as accessible as possible - language, location, context, and support.
- **Build trust and power:** Building bridges between community members and local government; strengthening community members' ability to impact decisions that affect their lives.
- **Ongoing two-way dialog:** Listening is instrumental; sharing information and also gathering feedback and hearing questions and issues; letting people know how their input helped shape decisions.
- **Adaptability:** Changing program policies to reflect community input amid shifting circumstances.
- **Invest in people:** Community Connectors are paid stipends for their cultural talents and time.
- **Co-design:** City staff and community members work together early to ensure cultural relevancy.

Examples

Community Connectors-in-Residence: Supporting the voices and building the power of underrepresented community members by reducing barriers to community engagement, advancing racial equity, and surfacing the ideas, concerns, and dreams of community members.

Emergency Response Connectors: Building trust between community members and local government, sharing COVID updates and public health guidelines, outreaching and navigating for basic needs services, and surfacing the issues and ideas of community members.

Best practices for engaging community members (from a Community Connector)

Look to people who are reaching out and leading already; build on that strength and interest.

The best connections are one-on-one and personal.

Make the experiences valuable. People stay engaged because they know they'll get important information/learning/knowledge by participating.

Be non-judgmental.