

# 6 Tips For Effective Engagement

Reaching ‘hard to reach’ populations can help address health inequalities and engage marginalized sectors of society into services. Commonly identified as ‘hard to reach’ populations include: Children and the elderly, sex workers, people with substance use disorders, people living with HIV, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities. ‘Hard to reach’ populations are also defined as inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason. Using the language ‘hard to reach’ can be off-putting to some as it can be seen as blaming the marginalized groups rather than the actual barriers that need to be looked at and addressed. Therefore using terminology like “unengaged in services” or “those who do not come to see us” “fallen through the net” “left out of the loop” are less stigmatizing.

**1** Build partnerships among community organizations. This is often a required or a heavily encouraged funding criterium for grants. You can think of partners as a signal booster to reach more people and serve people in other ways.

**2** Partnerships are great for reaching communities but clear distinctions in services provided should be made to clear up confusion from clients or staff. Sometimes this must be acknowledged as a limitation of services by one partner and that can often be hard. Build trust and respect with the clients when they do come in for services.

**3** Create a genuinely welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere upon entering the office and the clients first contact. Have a range of services to accommodate needs such as flexible office hours, and out of office outreach. It is also important for individuals to receive ample opportunity to provide feedback and be listened to when concerns arise.

**4** Be as flexible as possible with the clients who do come in. Run outreach services, listen to feedback, and offer flexible opening hours. Offer services that clients want can also be beneficial to at least get them started. Being flexible early will make things easier later.

**5** Get client involvement and participation. Clients know best how it feels to be a client and they can bridge the gap between the services and the ‘hard to reach’ populations. They can often find a way to open doors a staff member might not even see.

**6** Staff should challenge themselves to understand how their own biases impact interactions with various marginalized groups, consult with others, and obtain additional education.

