

Engaging Community Partners

Engaged partners are the key to a successful community-based program. Strong partnerships with trusted, highly regarded organizations strengthen our ability to reach diverse audiences while greatly expanding opportunities for directly involving men and boys.

There are many things to consider when it comes time to pick potential partners. Our organizations may not share the social background, culture, or politics of the organizations we want to work with as partners. To ensure success and build trust, it's important for us to recognize and respect differences, then acknowledge and work to overcome our individual and/or organizational biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. When we do this, ending violence against women is a goal that can bring us all closer together.

If your organization needs help with the partnership building process, you may want to consider the ideas and strategies listed below. These approaches to community organizing are discussed in detail in the sections listed below. Building these considerations into your plan will help you lay a strong foundation as you begin establishing alliances with new groups and organizations and building solidarity with others from diverse social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

Our work with men and boys must strive to engage a diverse group of male allies who are equipped to address issues of violence against women with cultural awareness. To most effectively reach our goal of ending violence against women and girls we must challenge ourselves to consider the unique needs of the participants as they ask us for gender as well as culturally specific responses. As we come across diverse opinions, it becomes important for us to understand how and in what ways culture shapes individuals, families and communities and how they in turn shape culture.

If our goal is to ensure that men and boys are able to engage fully in preventing violence against women and building healthy intimate relationships it is important to understand how culture shapes:

- An individual's experience of violence and the effects on children and youth
- Gender socialization and gender roles
- Our own responses within the culture of the systems and organizations in which we work

This may mean having an intentional discussion with a diverse group of male participants about the subtle and not so subtle differences in how their race, sexual orientation, or class effects their experience of gender socialization. It could mean providing educational and community support advocacy for a boy with disabilities well beyond the scope of violence prevention services. This could mean making intentional and sustained efforts to have culturally specific food and materials available in our programs. On a larger scope, this could mean taking on a project to make physical space and programming accessible to people with disabilities. Or acknowledging and honoring the different cultural pressures around manhood exerted on an adolescent immigrant from El Salvador, a wealthy white teen growing up in a suburb of New York City, or a young man questioning his gender in rural Georgia.

Use these **Questions** to revisit Cultural Considerations:

- Does our staff represent the diversity of the populations we serve?
- Are all staff allowed time for personal work and training on developing cultural competency including self examination, understanding power differentials, accepting different values, and understanding the diversity of the communities accessing our program?
- Do we ask men and boys how we could better meet their unique needs and consistently incorporate their feedback into our practice?

- Do all staff understand the history that guides a particular community's perception of services (e.g. domestic violence shelters, police, child welfare)? Have we taken steps to create plans that will meet the needs of individuals from that community?
- Have we truly made efforts to collaborate with under-served communities and their representing organizations, learn from them, and create sustainable plans for working together and providing a wider range of culturally sensitive violence prevention programs for men and boys?
- Do we have outreach strategies to reach under-served communities?
- Do we have a plan for accessing relevant language, deaf and hard of hearing interpreters?
- Do we consistently examine our spaces, decorations, activities, and public education materials or cultural relevance?

<http://engagingmen.futureswithoutviolence.org/mobilize-your-community/>