

5 Steps for Launching Your Community Outreach and Engagement Program



Strong partnerships between educators and parents and the community are among the greatest needs in public education today. Affiliates across the country are turning this obstacle into an opportunity to improve student outcomes. Thanks to outreach and engagement of educators, parents, and the community, they've dismantled toxic testing, reduced class size and invested in—rather than close—struggling schools. In the process, they're discovering a new path toward Association leadership and activism and securing important wins for students, educators and the greater common good.

Follow these five steps to build partnerships with the community:

☐ 1. LINK ENGAGEMENT GOALS TO AFFILIATE GOALS.

Consider your organizational goals. Increasing membership. Getting ESSA right in your district. Fighting privatization. Have conversations with key people within the Association—UniServ, ARs, the Board—about how those goals could benefit from the Association having ongoing mutually supportive relationships with other groups and individuals in the community.

The bottom line: community outreach and engagement is not a separate body of work, but a smart strategy that should be integrated into all we do!

☐ 2. GET MEMBERS INVOLVED.

Members aren't just educators. They're coaches and customers. Parishioners and party activists. Neighbors and volunteers. When it comes to building your outreach and engagement program that makes them a great place to start. Don't forget our ESPs tend to live where they work and retired members possess gifts of experience and time—assets to be leveraged. From surveys on where they live, play, and pray to establishing a "Community Connections" committee, an outreach and engagement program builds bridges to two key constituencies: the community and members! Use this as an engagement tool that meets an important need of members, while also allowing them to get connected and stay connected to their Association.

☐ 3. MAP YOUR COMMUNITY.

To engage the community you must understand the community. Who are the organizations touching the concerns of students, educators and public schools? What agencies and groups are respected for doing good work? Go beyond the usual suspects to influencers like entertainment, businesses and media figures that enjoy grassroots respect and loyalty. How are your leaders, members and staff connected? Lastly, make sure your community engagement looks like your community. Diversity across geographic, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines is essential.

☐ 4. KNOW YOUR REPUTATION.

Two prevailing narratives: the union as the obstacle or the union as the opportunist equals long-standing skepticism. Whether a result of reformers' dirty tactics or because the Association hasn't been visible since the last funding fight, an honest assessment about how others in the community see us is first step toward building trust. Just as your community is not monolithic, your reputation probably won't be either. As a reflective exercise, knowing our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be instructive on who to outreach—and how to engage and even navigate challenges.

☐ 5. REACH OUT. ENGAGE. CONNECT.

Look to the current priorities and upcoming events of community groups for ways to kick start engagement. Schedule coffee and LISTEN to ideas on how the Association could partner. Get on e-mail lists and use social media to like, follow and show support. Offer space and other resources of the Association. Invite the community in by adding parent, community and even student elements to Association events. But make it FUN, sitting through a long policy meeting is not the way to build a relationship.

For more information, contact CAPE Senior Policy Specialist Stacey Grissom at sgrissom@nea.org.