

“Getting Started in Community Science”

Discussion Guide

This guide poses questions around three broad stages of working collaboratively with community partners on community science initiatives - building internal support, developing equitable relationships, and co-creating projects - for your team to thoughtfully consider, discuss, and revisit periodically. Your team discussions will likely require some pre-work to better understand the history of related efforts and/or to understand individual stakeholders (inside and outside of your organization) who will be important to your strategic planning and decision-making processes. These stakeholders may include community leaders and elected officials as well as your institution’s finance and marketing teams. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community science, so this guide is not a checklist but rather a framework for near-term community science efforts as well as long-term engagement.

1) Building internal support for community science

Assessing your institution’s readiness

- **How does this collaborative work support your mission and vision?** What is your long-term vision for engagement? Who needs to be “on board” or “bought in” to ensure there is sustained support for community science? Is this work considered a priority within your institution? Are there supporting institutional resources available? What motivates you to engage in collaborative community science work?
- **Who from within your institution should be involved?** Who will be the points of contact for your community-based partners? How will you manage partner communication if/when staffing changes occur? Beyond those directly engaged with community partners, who will provide necessary internal administrative support (i.e., finance, marketing)? What kind of skills or expertise are needed to engage in the specific context you are working in?

Clarifying your goals

- **What are you offering? What are you looking for?** What motivates you or your institution to engage collaboratively with your community? Before reaching out to potential partners, can you clearly articulate the types of support and resources you are bringing to the partnership? When considering who might be the right partner(s) for your institution, can you clearly articulate the reasons why you are interested in working with community-serving organizations?
- **How can you be open and responsive to requests coming from your community?** How will you make your institution available to potential partners? How will you ensure that community groups clearly know they can reach out if/when they have science-related questions?

2) Developing an equitable community-based relationship

Understanding your partner

- **Who represents the community you want to work with?** ASTC defines “communities” broadly—as connected or organized groups of people who share a common geography, jurisdiction, set of characteristics, interests, or goals—not solely a particular racial or ethnic group or zip code. Which community-based organizations or interest groups can authentically represent the people you seek to serve?
- **What history or context needs to be taken into consideration when working with this community?** What is the relational history between the community and your institution? Do any of your colleagues have existing relationships with community representatives that should be respected as you move forward? Are there past harms that should be acknowledged and addressed?
- **What does accessibility require in your context?** How can you offer multiple methods for engaging a diverse group of people who may have different learning styles, schedule constraints, or access to online platforms or physical spaces? What support can you offer, or what responsibilities can you take on to make it easier for your community partners to engage in this work?

Centering and respecting community priorities and strengths

- **How will your community be involved in shaping the questions or objectives that guide your work?** What type of input do you need to understand the community's key priorities? How well do the community's priorities align with your institution's priorities?
- **How will you honor and center the community's lived experiences?** How will you identify, tailor to, and elevate the community's contributions, cultures, and values through your collaborative work? How will you ensure respectful inclusion of community knowledges?
- **How will you leverage your community's strengths?** What resources, expertise, or connections does your community partner have that will benefit your shared work?

3) Co-creating a long-term project plan

Sharing leadership

- **How will you share decision-making power with your partners?** How will you demonstrate accountability to your partners? How will you manage co-ownership of physical products (such as data collections, analyses, and results) as well as co-ownership of the communications and impacts of those products?
- **How will you check in with your partners to ensure they feel ownership?** Do your partners feel they have control and responsibility over how work occurs? What work might be needed to address power imbalances among partners? Is there neutral and/or welcoming space for partners to provide feedback?

Planning for action

- **How will you seek to advance community priorities?** What are your short- and long-term outcomes? How will this community science work enable future efforts to advance community priorities?

- **What type of action best supports your objectives?** Are you seeking to make change through civic action, advocacy, and policymaking, or does your work focus on community-level interventions?
- **How will you know if you are successful?** What type of data or inputs will demonstrate progress? Are there non-traditional data and inputs held or valued by the community you should consider? How will you systematically collect and evaluate these data?

Focusing on equity

- **How will you explicitly and openly discuss and address power imbalances, biases, and discrimination?** How will you work to allocate resources and assign responsibilities in a manner that leads to equitable processes and outcomes?
- **How will you strive to ensure that your collaborative efforts are accessible to your community partners and members?** How do considerations such as location, transportation, time commitment, time of day, childcare, and food factor into event planning?

Resources

Below we've highlighted resources that are well suited to supporting early-stage planning and development for community science partnerships. ASTC has also curated other community science resources contextualized for science centers and museums. Explore our [Resource Library](#) for other tools, guidance, and examples.

["Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships" Resources from the Community Tool Box.](#) This toolkit from the University of Kansas' Center for Community Health and Development provides guidance for creating and sustaining partnerships among different organizations to address a common goal, including key questions for consideration and real-world examples. In addition, the toolkit includes many other resources to support work to bring about positive change in your community.

[STEM Racial Justice Project Resources from Science Museum of Minnesota.](#) This website includes templates and example materials for conducting outreach with community groups, defining roles and responsibilities, meeting planning and facilitation, and more. The resources promote an equitable community engagement approach, which requires first building trust and making space for community groups' "asks and offers," followed by stages of contribution, collaboration, and co-creation.

[Evaluating Community Engagement: An Evaluation Guide and Toolkit for Practice Use.](#) This guide from Everyday Democracy offers tips for evaluating community engagement, including hands-on tools to help you determine if you are ready to evaluate your community engagement work as well as considerations for implementing an evaluation. The guide is not a comprehensive evaluation tool but rather a primer that offers guiding principles and basic instruction when evaluating community engagement.

[The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement Skills Wheel.](#) This Skills Wheel provides a framework of five competencies comprised of 45 skills that are fundamental for collaborative engagement in scientific work. No single individual needs to have all skills described in order to be successful, but teams working on community science efforts will benefit from having a wide range of these skills.

[ASTC's Community Science Clinics](#) offer an opportunity to connect with fellow community science practitioners and learn from and ask questions of your peers. [Sign up for our interest list](#) to learn about upcoming meetings and other training and funding opportunities.