

Low-Income People

Who They Are:

While the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2016 was \$24,300 for a family of four, in reality many people earning over the FPL are still living under very constrained budgets in most of the United States. Percentage of Area Median Income (AMI) is often used instead as an indicator of economic status because it is relative to the income of the county or metropolitan area, which reflects cost of living and perceptions of economic status. Many agencies consider 80% of AMI to be a general standard of economic disadvantage.

Many low-income people balance multiple jobs and face insecurity of housing, food, and transportation. They also struggle to pay for daycare. They are likely to receive information through word-of-mouth, social media, or community organizations.



Best Practices:

Low-income people have specific needs that may present a challenge to agencies looking to involve them. Outreach should be:

- **Convenient:** With multiple responsibilities and limited transportation budgets, low-income people may have difficulties traveling far to reach a public meeting; events should take place in their neighborhoods. Pop-up or mobile outreach may also be more effective. If a local meeting is not possible, consider reimbursing transportation costs for eligible participants or providing bus tickets.
- **Incentivized:** Providing activities for children or food at a meeting may be a draw to participation, as would cash for more intense involvement, like focus groups.
- **Rooted in the Community:** An outreach worker who grew up in the community will be more effective and build a better rapport with residents.
- **A Positive Reflection of the Community:** With multiple responsibilities and limited transportation budgets, low-income people may have difficulties traveling far to reach a public meeting; events should take place in their neighborhoods. Pop-up or mobile outreach may also be more effective. If a local meeting is not possible, consider reimbursing transportation costs for eligible participants or providing bus tickets.

- **Done in Partnerships:** Many community organizations enjoy great respect among the groups they serve, and are happy to help public agencies serve them as well. Doing outreach in partnership with local organization can lead to better results.



<https://thedistance.com/worlds-largest-laundromat/>

Recommended Strategies:

- **Trusted Advocates:** Hire outreach workers for specific demographics who are already respected members of that community. They can serve as liaisons that link the agency to the community by facilitating communication and recruiting participants at agency events.

- **Advisory Boards/Committees for Specific Populations:** Form a board comprised solely of members from a specific community or demographic. This group can serve to develop ideas for outreach to low-income communities or provide insightful guidance throughout the planning process.

- **“Laundry Day” Outreach:** Conducting outreach events or surveys in or near laundromats engages a captive audience, who are more likely to participate in surveys or Q and A sessions than people who are on their way to somewhere. The audience is also likely to be local, especially in major cities.

- **Key Person Interview :** Conducting interview with respected community leaders can help obtain information and insight into a specific community or issue. The key person may be an organization leader, elected official, media representative, faith leader, or someone else with standing in the target community.

- **Fund CBOs for Outreach:** Draw on the expertise of a Community-Based Organization (CBO) by funding them through small grants to help reach a target population.

- **Students Surveying Parents:** Elementary students can be assigned to interview family members about a local issue or transportation project.

- **Study Circles:** A study circle is a group of 8 to 12 people who meet regularly over a period of time to address a critical public issue in a democratic, collaborative way. Participants examine the issue from many points of view and identify areas of common ground, emerging with recommendations for action. Study circles can engage populations traditionally underserved by other outreach efforts, and can help address barriers to engagement that low-income communities face.

Example:

The City of Seattle uses Public Outreach Engagement Liaisons (POELs) to reach underserved communities, following the Trusted Advocates model described here. POELs have diverse backgrounds, language abilities, and skillsets so their role is adaptable to the needs of the agency. It is hoped that gained experience and training provided on specific skill sets will lead to participants not only being effective POELs, but also transitioning to community leadership roles beyond the POELs program.

Presenting a community member as liaison fosters confidence that community interests are being served. Greater trust leads to greater participation, which leads to more effective program implementation.

<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/outreach-and-engagement>