Ten Tips for a Better Turnout at Community Engagement Events

1. Acknowledge that some people may not have had a positive experience with public participation. Whether your program or event builds on an existing form of engagement or you're trying something new, if you've recognized this reality, you'll be able to take steps to build a good reputation for this kind of work.

2. Think like a skeptic when you are creating your messages and marketing materials. Remember that what you say to someone who has participated in the past and had a bad experience is not likely to be true because engaging with you in the past means they were able to engage with you in the first place.

3. Involve people who haven't been invited before or who don't often attend community events. These are the people whose demographics of our communities are changing, and unfortunately the leadership doesn't always reflect the diversity of our communities. Be intentional about reaching out to different groups in your community, especially ones who are underrepresented.

4. Start small. Changing people's perceptions won't happen overnight. Your community may not be ready to work on a larger event if that's your goal. You can start with smaller events or meetings and gather dust.

5. Try different ways of engaging the community. There is no one size fits all for any community or situation. Always be prepared to learn and adapt your program and adapt them to fit your unique needs.

6. Focus on quality. When people participate in a well-run event, they are more likely to be satisfied with their experience. Get feedback from participants to ensure your program is reputable for your organization, for the events you host, and for the community you want to serve. See who your community's success story is around – that's the best kind of outcome you can have.

7. Show participants that you value their opinion. The best way to do this is to listen to them. Listen in a way that is open and honest dialogue with people. By doing this, you are helping to create stronger communities if we share what we've learned with others.

8. Get creative and make it fun. People want to spend their free time doing something they enjoy. Think about your event or program and adapt them to fit your unique needs.

9. Keep track of what you're learning about your community. Be aware of the types of events, length of commitment, online and offline options, and other factors. This information will help you to improve your programs, so you don't so improve each time you ask the public to participate.

10. Share what you've learned with others. We'll be able to share what we've learned with the people who don't often attend community events.

Congratulations Cindy!