

Outreach to Faith-Based Organizations During COVID-19

The Value of Faith-Based Organizations

Effective COVID-19 community response draws on community strengths and trusted community networks. Faith-based leaders and organizations have a long history of collaborating with government agencies. Faith-based organizations provide social and spiritual connections plus play a critical role in providing and supporting social services within communities.

Below are tips for connecting and collaborating with faith-based organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Identify Communities to Connect With

- Do some research to get to know which religious communities are active in your state
- Reach out to local public health to see what connections they already have with faith communities in their counties
- Consider equity. Which groups do not already have broad, well-resourced networks and access to culturally relevant information and resources? Although these communities may be smaller, outreach to them may have a larger impact
- Identify community health workers and parish nurse networks in the area
- Consider what structures exist within the faith community such as sectors or denominations

Reach out to Faith-based Organizations

- Identify among your team if there is anyone who is a member of the faith group or who already has a connection, such as a friend, friend-of-a-friend, or neighbor.

- Ask a Community Health Worker (CHW) or nurse to help you to understand the cultural values and practices that can impact the health behavior related to COVID-19 and vaccination in the community
- Approach with respect, curiosity, sincerity, and openness
- Acknowledge that they are already doing work to help their community during the pandemic
- Make the effort and take the time to find the point person within each group. CHWs can help connect you with the appropriate person. You may need to meet with several people before you find the right connection in each faith group
- Be sure to bring something to offer to the conversation and ask what they need. Listening skills are essential
- Address the power differential between a public health entity and a faith group

Build the Relationship

- Individualize your outreach to each person and each faith group
- Communicate in their primary language whenever possible
- Identify speakers in the community in all the languages spoken in the community that can assist you with communication and outreach
- Ask how they are already reaching their community during this time and be open to learning new approaches
- Accept invitations to join their convenings to listen or provide information
- Host open calls with any faith groups who want to join. Make them as accessible and inclusive as possible. Keep in mind, however, that some groups will need different meeting structure to be inclusive, so open meetings will not reach everyone
- Use inclusive language
- Follow up with them on their questions that you do not have the answer to right away
- Make an effort to provide updates on changing guidance and work with leaders to understand how the changes may impact their community or worship practices
- Offer to adapt existing guidance to their cultural context, when possible

- Create an email box where people can reach out with questions or requests
- Use cultural humility and acknowledge that many communities view the ideas of health and healing differently
- Ensure that updates are reaching key communicators in large faith communities
- Prepare to consider innovative solutions to each community's unique concerns