Centering Equity in Engagement:

Best Practices for Engaging Communities to Emerge Healthier from the Pandemic

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Morehouse School of Medicine and the National COVID-19 Resiliency Network (NCRN) have worked diligently during the COVID -19 pandemic to provide testing and vaccination information, and link people to healthcare, social services, and other critical resources. We are accomplishing this through engagement and partnership with over 400 community-based organizations representing a broad range of priority populations. This resource was developed from recommendations shared by NCRN Strategic Partners at our National Advisory Board Meeting on April 19, 2022. The goal of this resource is to leverage the experience and expertise of NCRN partners by providing actionable advice to guide community engagement best practices. Academic organizations, public companies, and local, state, and federal bodies can use this information to effectively engage community organizations to advance health equity during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

1. Academic, private, and government partners should be more adaptable in their approaches to align with the needs of disproportionately affected communities based on input from community members.

2. Be conscious of the capacity around human capital, cost, and alignment of priorities when working in partnership with community-based organizations that serve disproportionately impacted populations; it is crucial that these partnerships are equitable with respect to meaningful leadership, agency, power, and funding support.

3. It is crucial to sustain and build upon the trust and partnerships across sectors that have been built during the COVID-19 pandemic, beyond the pandemic, so that this hard earned, valuable trust is not squandered.

4. When planning and executing implementation projects designed for disproportionately affected populations, be sure that the governing board and leadership of the projects include community representatives and that the programmatic focus is prioritized by the community.

5. When there are efforts around strategic planning to guide interventions in communities with under-represented populations, strategic planning that is not majority centered should be designed to be intentionally inclusive of priority populations with respect to geography, language, culture, and disability.