



TOOLKIT

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Building partnerships with community members to advance public health

Tools, questions, and guidance to start a “community ambassador” program at your organization

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit includes guidance on conceptualizing your program to evaluating it, and all the budgeting, recruitment, and training in between. We have linked templates and samples throughout that you can use and adapt for your own program. If you are reading a printed copy of this toolkit, you can find the online version and supplemental materials at camdenhealth.org/CA-toolkit.



Dedication

The Camden Coalition dedicates this toolkit to the memory of Michael Jackson, a Community Ambassador who passionately served the Camden community. His leadership and collaboration helped shape the Camden Coalition's Community Ambassador program, making this all possible.

Hear from Michael himself about his experience as a community leader with the Camden Coalition [in this video](#).

Overview

This toolkit is designed for program managers and others in similar roles who are interested in starting a program that partners with community liaisons to advance public health goals. It is based on the experience of the Camden Coalition's Community Ambassadors program and will therefore draw on examples and use language from our program while aiming to offer practical guidance for designing a program that fits your organization's unique needs.

The Camden Coalition's Community Ambassadors program prepares trusted community messengers to share important public health information and answer questions from their networks of community residents and leaders. Community Ambassadors also bring information and feedback from community members back to healthcare organizations and public officials to inform the direction of their work.

This **bidirectional dialogue** between the community and the health and social care organizations that seek to serve it is a core component of a successful community ambassador program. This type of program creates direct avenues to include people with lived experience in problem-solving and innovation that help keep their families and neighbors healthy, especially in times of crisis like a pandemic.



Lessons learned

After three years of running the Camden Coalition's Community Ambassadors program, here are some of the key lessons we learned:

- ▶ **People with lived experience interacting with an organization's service areas (e.g., organizations providing complex care, immigrant healthcare, pediatrics) are uniquely suited to understanding the needs and assets of their community.**

Organizations have much to gain from working with individuals directly impacted by the services they provide. These individuals can provide invaluable insights on program design and strategies for community outreach, health education, and addressing issues of access.

- ▶ **Communities that have been impacted by systemic racism and marginalization are often rightfully distrusting of systems of care.**

Partnering with community members who share cultures, languages, and lived experience with other residents can help organizations build trust with the communities they serve.

- ▶ **To help build authentic and mutually beneficial partnerships with people with lived experience, it is important for organizations to thoughtfully approach community engagement efforts.**

This includes:

- inviting people with lived experience to help define the role and level of engagement they will have;
- compensating people with lived experience fairly for their time and effort;
- ensuring diverse and representative participation of people with lived experience; and
- ensuring that people with lived experience are made aware of the outcomes of their work.

We at the Camden Coalition have benefited greatly from building authentic partnerships with people with lived experience of complex health and social needs across our community engagement programs. Along with the Community Ambassadors, these programs include:

- ▶ Our Community Advisory Committee (CAC), a group of Camden residents and/or former program participants who act as an official part of our organization's governance structure. The CAC advises our staff and Board of Trustees on consumer and community health needs
- ▶ Our National Consumer Scholars program, through which consumer leaders and advocates with lived experience of complex health and social needs from across the country take part in leadership development activities and help shape the field of complex care
- ▶ Amplify, our consumer voices bureau, connects organizations with potential collaborators with lived experience

The Why: What problem are you solving?

Before determining if a community ambassador/liaison program is right for your organization, it is important to have clarity on the problem you're trying to solve. Without it, it will be challenging to engage community members and other stakeholders in the work. What's your why?

To better understand the problem you're trying to solve, first dig into why things are the way they are, look at the data to see who is disproportionately impacted, and then work alongside people with lived experience to determine the program's desired outcomes. Understanding the problem helps you identify and include impacted communities and other partners to co-create the solutions.

For example, health systems require authentic community engagement in order to tailor services, education, and crisis response for different populations to ensure successful implementation. Otherwise, we design programs that we think will work and miss reasons why the intended audience won't engage with them.

“The need in the city of Camden is great. If you go downtown, you will see people using drugs, but something had to come before the drugs – some form of trauma that they are self-medicating. We can help because we are boots on the ground. A lot of times organizations do not see what we see.”

– **Miguel Rodriguez, Community Ambassador and former Chair of the Camden Coalition CAC**

There are several benefits to building a community ambassador/liaison program, including, but not limited to:

- ▶ Understanding what could be causing differences in health outcomes (e.g., a spike in COVID cases in a local neighborhood) from the people directly experiencing them
- ▶ Identifying ideal community-based sites to partner with to improve access to services (e.g., faith-based organizations offering emergency food distribution)
- ▶ Building an infrastructure that can support access to, and awareness of, needed services as soon as they become available
- ▶ Increasing the number of people participating in public health services (e.g., cancer screening)
- ▶ Developing a base of informed, trusted, and connected people with lived experience who can serve on high-level advisory boards
- ▶ Including real-time community insights in public health planning
- ▶ Quickly getting the word out in an environment of rapidly changing information
- ▶ Ensuring quality, factual information is received well by communities who may be distrustful of traditional institutions
- ▶ Supporting community leaders in keeping their friends, families, and neighbors healthy

The origin of the Camden Coalition's Community Ambassadors program

Our origins in this work didn't begin with a public health initiative per se. In late 2019, as communities across the US prepared for the 2020 Census, Camden Coalition staff and members of the CAC worried that the transition to an online questionnaire, federal budget cuts, and potential changes to Census questions would prevent many people in Camden from being counted. Since Census counts impact everything from Congressional representation to funding available for health and social services, we saw this as an important opportunity for our CAC to engage as trusted messengers with the community to do Census outreach and education. Shortly after training a cohort of Census Ambassadors and scheduling our first in-person outreach events, the COVID-19 pandemic struck our communities.

Most of the information about how to keep safe from COVID-19 was coming from government agencies like the CDC and medical professionals. Given the city's history, Camden residents had lost trust in public officials and medical professionals, and this information wasn't reaching the people who were most at risk. In response, the Camden Coalition, along with partners at Cooper University Health Care (Cooper) and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJ DOH), saw an opportunity to recruit people with lived experience of complex health and social needs and train them to

become trusted messengers. We quickly pivoted, using our Census Ambassador model to train a team of COVID Community Ambassadors on the latest information about COVID transmission and testing, arming them with materials to share via social media and while canvassing their neighborhoods.

According to Victor Murray, Senior Director of Community Engagement and Capacity Building, during the pandemic "the Camden Coalition was closer to the community than ever before in our history as an organization. The pandemic forced all of us to think about our work differently. We see our Ambassador program as a seed for the future of the public health workforce here in Camden."

We believe our Community Ambassadors program serves as the foundation to collaboratively and effectively address the public health issues that matter to the communities we serve.

"We see our Ambassador program as a seed for the future of the public health workforce here in Camden."

- Victor Murray, Senior Director of Community Engagement and Capacity Building at the Camden Coalition



Budgeting

Budgeting is one of the tools that helps when developing a program because it gets you to think about your financial capacity, which will shape the size and scope of your program.

When we started our Community Ambassadors program, the Camden Coalition's finance team helped our program team create a budget sheet in Excel to see how numbers changed as we made different assumptions about programmatic needs. Our finance team also provided percentages for indirect costs and a model for staff salaries.

We recommend working with your finance and grants teams to help develop the budget and write funding proposals and financial reports. [Here is a sample budget model](#) for reference.

Find the sample budget and other supplemental materials at camdenhealth.org/CA-toolkit

When organizing your budget, think about:

- ▶ What is the timeline that you want the program to run through?
- ▶ Who will staff the program?
- ▶ How much is a fair stipend for each ambassador/liaison?
- ▶ What kind of training materials will you use?

In preparing the budget, consider staff costs such as program managers, supervisors, and subject matter experts (e.g., nurses, doctors, etc.).

The ideal staff person to run a program like this is someone with connections to residents and community-based organizations, who can coordinate various stakeholders, who has experience with coaching and capacity building, and who can solicit feedback for continuous improvement. They do not have to be an expert in public health, but they should be able to identify and partner with those who are.

A top priority for the Camden Coalition was providing a stipend to Ambassadors. We believe this should be a top priority for any program partnering with people with lived experience. While our Ambassadors are deeply passionate about the work and intrinsically motivated, it is also important that they, like anyone else, are compensated for their time, effort, and expertise. In addition to the stipend, the Camden Coalition works to remove barriers to participation by covering travel expenses related to Ambassador activities and offering support with navigating other health and social service benefits.

While travel expenses can be covered without a direct exchange of funds to the ambassador, when it comes time to pay your community ambassadors a stipend, you may need to provide them with **invoice templates** for them to submit to your finance team. [Here is an example of what one such template looks like.](#)

Given your organization's funding opportunities, you will need to decide how many ambassadors you can financially sustain monthly. If there is no limit on funding, set a goal for your organization on how many active community ambassadors would be ideal at any given time. The Camden Coalition started out with five and now maintains about 10 active Community Ambassadors.

One major challenge in compensating people with lived experience is the looming concern of losing public benefits. Many of the people our organizations serve (in our case, people living with complex health and social needs) receive federal and/or state benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid, and subsidized housing.

For those individuals, receiving or retaining additional income can jeopardize benefit eligibility. Disability rights and public benefits advocates refer to this as the “benefits cliff.” Often talked about in relation to “low wage” workers, the “benefits cliff” presents a significant barrier to fairly compensating many individuals with lived experience who engage in work as consumer advocates and advisors. For example, anything over \$80/month impacts SSI. [Read more on this topic here.](#)

Depending on the state in which your organization is located, benefit amounts and requirements may vary. We recommend consulting with members of a community advisory board, benefits navigators, and potential ambassadors themselves to better understand the specific benefits cliff in your state or community.

Therefore, when determining a stipend amount, consider how many hours a month you estimate each type of ambassador (see more about ambassador types in the Recruitment section of this toolkit) will give to the program beyond their normal activities.

Consider minimum wages, your organizational pay philosophy, and the maximum amount an ambassador can receive without disrupting their benefits.

In New Jersey, the Camden Coalition’s approach to compensation based on the type of Ambassador in our program model is outlined here:

- ▶ **Network Ambassadors:** There is no financial compensation because this is a mutually beneficial partnership where leaders, who already share information with their networks, are receiving up-to-date and accurate information from us and helping us disseminate that information to diverse groups.
- ▶ **Community Ambassadors:** \$1,200 stipend for 3 months paid based on involvement, which includes attending all monthly trainings and check-ins, and an average of two canvassing opportunities or events per month.
- ▶ **Youth Ambassadors:** \$1,200 stipend for six weeks with the expectation that they attend all monthly training and check-ins, write blogs and social media posts, participate in all canvassing opportunities or events during that time, and recruit other youth.

The difference in the stipend for Youth and Community Ambassadors is because Youth Ambassadors do the equivalent amount of work in six weeks that a Community Ambassador is expected to do in three months.



Recruitment

A community ambassador program can't exist without ambassadors, so recruitment is the next step after you know your budget.

“Community ambassadors are a team of advocates working collectively to move low-income and minority communities forward,” says Cisily Brown, one of our Community Ambassadors. Ambassadors do this by creating consistent channels of communication between themselves, the communities they are from, and local health organizations.

As in the [evidence-based models](#) of community health workers (CHWs) and promotores, community ambassadors should be members of the community they serve. This can mean a number of things: being a resident, someone who shares the target population identity (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation), and/or being a leader in a local community-led organization.

It is important that ambassadors have shared experiences with the people whom they will encounter and speak the language of the community. This may mean that your organization will need to translate materials and trainings into other languages like Spanish, Vietnamese, or Creole. It also means you should be aware of jargon and use more lay-person terms in communicating with ambassadors and the broader public.

The city of Camden is a majority Black and Latinx community. As in so many other cities and communities of color, the demographics and lived experiences of local public health officials and healthcare providers in Camden do not necessarily reflect those of the community they serve. Therefore, the Camden Coalition focused recruitment on ambassadors that reflected the demographics of the city's residents, including native Spanish-speakers.

Ambassador roles & requirements

Michael Jackson, another Camden Coalition Community Ambassador, explains that “The value of being an ambassador is being able to help the community with the right information so they can make the right choices. We also get the right information from the community and give it back to the Coalition so that they can use the information to make changes that would benefit the community.”

We encourage organizations to consider different types of ambassadors/liaisons with varying responsibilities that reflect the organization's needs and can accommodate different levels of engagement and time commitment. One way to determine the differences in responsibilities is to ask prospective ambassadors how much time they are willing to commit and what activities they would recommend as most effective to reach their peers. Depending on what you hear, you can create two or more levels of ambassadors with clear delineations of roles and responsibilities.

“The value of being an ambassador is being able to help the community with the right information so they can make the right choices.

– *Michael Jackson, Camden Coalition Community Ambassador*

At the Camden Coalition, we created a three-tier ambassador structure. Community Ambassadors are expected to engage in community outreach activities like canvassing, give presentations to community groups, and engage with community members at public events, while Network Ambassadors relay information through their existing networks without taking on additional responsibilities. Youth Ambassadors are community members aged 13-22 who engage in community outreach to their peers.

Because not everyone will be able to dedicate time to go beyond their typical methods of sharing information, we found it valuable to have people like faith leaders, small business owners, and social service providers acting as Network Ambassadors by using their current platforms

to spread the word. The Network Ambassadors also serve as a bench of people who might step up to do more Community Ambassador-level activities in months when other Community Ambassadors may need to step back into less effort-intensive activities.

Youth often receive their information from and trust different sources than adults. That is why Camden Coalition decided to create separate expectations and strategies for Youth Ambassadors.

The table below shows the differences in roles and responsibilities between Camden Coalition’s Ambassador types. A similar diagram could be helpful for your program team to communicate the differences in expectations for your unique roles.

Role/responsibility	Network	Community	Youth
Attend trainings organized by your organization	✓	✓	✓
Review materials received	✓	✓	✓
Request additional training and/or materials that would improve their capacity to be Ambassadors	✓	✓	✓
Relay questions/concerns/themes from their networks back to your organization	✓	✓	✓
Utilize existing network channels to share information	✓	✓	✓
Be available to speak to groups on the topics that they are trained on		✓	✓
Be thought partners about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How to ensure equity in public health ▶ How to address the priorities, needs, and goals of the community ▶ Best ways to engage their peers 		✓	✓
Cultivate new channels for sharing information		✓	
Hand out fliers in neighborhoods and at community outreach events		✓	
Appropriately engage other youth on social media to share factual and relevant information and resources			✓

Recruitment strategies

There are several ways that an organization can go about recruiting community ambassadors/liaisons. These include:

- ▶ Inviting participants from your organization's programs and their families
- ▶ Asking board and staff members to assist in recruitment (e.g., their family members, using their proximity to other programs in your area)
- ▶ Engaging community partners who serve populations that are under-represented in your organization's programs
- ▶ Inviting members of established community advisory committees
- ▶ Working with faith-based institutions
- ▶ Coordinating with small business associations
- ▶ Attending local community events, such as health or resource fairs
- ▶ Establishing relationships with nurses, medical staff, and retirees looking for volunteer opportunities

The Camden Coalition's recruitment efforts depended heavily on access to existing networks of engaged people with lived experience. It is especially helpful when there are staff or leaders of those networks who can help identify potential ambassadors. For example, program assistants at a social service agency and case workers at the housing authority knew participants of their programs who could be good assets to our ambassador program. Word of mouth and warm hand-offs are core tools of our community engagement strategy. Often our care teams or partners gauge the interest of one of their program participants before referring them to us so that we can have a follow-up conversation about the program. Therefore, we recommend having a **recruitment flier** (here are examples of ours in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) and **program overview** that partners can share with their community network and/or hang in their offices.

When presenting the opportunity, consider the interests of the group you are sharing it with. To the right are some examples of how we focused our recruitment.

RECRUITMENT EXAMPLES

Recruiting high school students

When the Camden Coalition staff attended a high school health fair, we focused our conversations with students on how great it would look on their high school resume or college applications to have Youth Ambassador experience. It demonstrates leadership, communication, and community service skills. The stipend was an added motivation for youth due to their financial needs.

Leveraging connections

When the Camden Coalition presented the Community Ambassador program to allies on our Board of Trustees, we highlighted the Youth Ambassador option to our Vice Chair because her organization hires young staff for their health equity programs.

Recruiting faith leaders

When presenting the program to Network Ambassadors, for example faith-based leaders, the Camden Coalition got to know about their existing ministries and ways of communicating. Then, we discussed how they can serve as liaisons in their congregations through those established channels (e.g., weekly announcements or pastoral guidance) and how they can provide information to the population they serve (e.g., foodbanks, backpack drives).



Orientation & onboarding

In the beginning, organizing one or two orientation events to share information with groups of potential ambassadors can be helpful because you will likely have a large recruitment push ahead of the program start date. Depending on your organization's onboarding capacity and recruitment needs, you may decide to host regular orientation events or use technology to host orientation virtually.

At the Camden Coalition, we realized that while this approach makes sense when we have concentrated recruitment efforts, such as spring recruitment for summer Youth Ambassadors, it was otherwise more efficient to do orientation on a rolling basis. Instead of coordinating a robust orientation each time a new candidate arises, the program lead now orients a potential Ambassador to the role via a phone call.

During orientation, we recommend treating attendees as candidates who have not yet made their decision to become an ambassador. Therefore, consider what information would be helpful in making their decision. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ Context about the host organization
- ▶ Purpose of the program
- ▶ Roles and responsibilities of ambassadors and the host organization
- ▶ Estimated time commitment
- ▶ Compensation

Once someone agrees to move forward, think about how to formalize the relationship and prepare them to fulfill the roles of an ambassador with your organization. At a minimum, this likely includes some type of Memorandum of Understanding or Letter of Agreement, and onboarding training. Topics for onboarding could include:

- ▶ The responsibilities of ambassadors and the host organization
- ▶ How and where to access key public health resources in the local community
- ▶ Common myths about the current public health topic
- ▶ Online sources for up-to-date information on the current public health topic

At the Camden Coalition, we use an application process to train, test for understanding, and collect agreements necessary to formalize the relationship. We do this by sharing an outlined document that includes videos, web links, and areas of knowledge that Ambassadors may need. We then ask Ambassadors to complete a web form with questions that gauge understanding of the videos and information shared. This form also asks which level of Ambassador they would like to commit to. The reason the Camden Coalition opted for this virtual onboarding format is because it became time-consuming to conduct a full onboarding session live each time someone was recruited. Whether you choose to batch your recruits into a monthly or quarterly routine, or create your own virtual process, the [onboarding guide that we share here](#) could serve as a suggested outline.

Keep in mind that, to be inclusive in recruitment of a diverse ambassador team that is representative of your community, you may need to offer the application and accompanying materials in various languages. Additionally, potential ambassadors may have limited access and/or literacy with digital tools. Therefore, consider scheduling a one-on-one meeting or phone call to go through the materials together and have printed versions of documents that need signatures. Get creative and be flexible!

Regardless of how orientation and onboarding is conducted, it is important to have a legal agreement with ambassadors that outlines the agreed-upon expectations, payment, timeline, and terms of the relationships like this [Letter of Agreement \(LOA\)](#). If the ambassador will be compensated, we recommend the program lead reaches out to discuss payment logistics before having them sign the LOA and submit a W-9. Keep in mind that recruiting youth will require parental consent. You can adapt the Letter of Agreement to include a place for parents to sign if someone is under 18.



Training & support

One of the key elements of establishing an effective program is ensuring that ambassadors are prepared to have difficult conversations and have the most up-to-date information when they are out in the community. This will require a network of various experts you can call on to develop a flexible training program that allows your organization to be responsive to changes in the public health environment. It may also require additional supports from the staff to integrate this non-traditional workforce into program implementation.

Regardless of the program's current public health focus, there are some skills that will be foundational to the success of your ambassadors. Some of the trainings we recommend for standing up your program include:

- ▶ Motivational interviewing as a method to support behavior change
- ▶ Using personal stories to engage others and build trust
- ▶ Mental health 101 to introduce ambassadors to mental health concepts and tools
- ▶ First aid such as Narcan and CPR to prepare them for encounters in the community

Determining the topics

When starting an ambassador program, your organization has likely identified a current issue that the program will be designed to address. Over time, your organization may find it useful to apply the community ambassador model to other public health issues, thereby broadening your ambassadors' scope of work.

For example, due to the program's success at the Camden Coalition during the pandemic, we are making sure that increased community collaboration and our Community Ambassador model continue, and we have expanded the program into other areas of our work. These include:

- ▶ We are exploring how Community Ambassadors can partner in addressing unmet behavioral health needs.
- ▶ Our Community Ambassadors were approached by a local housing non-profit to address the importance of lead in homes. Our partners would train Ambassadors in the effects of lead and the process by which people can eliminate lead from their homes.
- ▶ While the Camden Coalition's Ambassadors are focused on Camden County, we provided partners in New Jersey's Salem and Cumberland Counties with the tools to implement a Youth Ambassador program in their region.

There are several ways to determine the focus of your ambassadors' work. One important source of potential topics is what ambassadors hear their neighbors talking about or expressing frustration with while canvassing and at events. Ambassadors may also have their own opinions about topics and resources that would be important for their community to have greater awareness of.

Additionally, your organization can facilitate check-ins with staff who interface with residents and partners in order to determine what topics they see as important to bring to the communities you serve. External partners (e.g., hospitals, health departments, pharmacies) may also bring ideas to the table about what they would like to promote to residents by partnering with ambassadors.

One topic that the New Jersey Department of Health brought to the Camden Coalition staff's attention was the restarting of Medicaid eligibility determination that had been suspended through the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Millions of Medicaid recipients nationwide will be affected by this change and required to reapply for Medicaid each year. Our organization had a discussion and decided to train Ambassadors to help ensure eligible community members are aware of how to stay enrolled in Medicaid.

Depending on the public health topic your ambassadors are focused on, we recommend developing additional trainings. Some of the other trainings the Camden Coalition has done include:

- ▶ Medicaid enrollment
- ▶ Cancer prevention
- ▶ Dangers of lead-based paint
- ▶ How different vaccines work
- ▶ Understanding the process for vaccine trials and approvals
- ▶ COVID and vaccine myth busters
- ▶ The perspective of a frontline healthcare worker in a hospital
- ▶ The inclusion of minority communities in medical research

Non-traditional workforce supports

Given that people with lived experience and youth may not have a traditional employment background and may not be connected to the same tools and resources as a full-time employee at your organization, it is important to have a different mindset and approach to working with this workforce. It requires patience, a willingness to adapt, and a more hands-on approach. Consider if there are additional supports that could be helpful in facilitating a mutually beneficial partnership.

For example, ambassadors will have other commitments and not everyone tracks their commitments using tools like email and online calendars. It is important to work with ambassadors on how they will keep track of appointments, meetings, events, and other promises so that they can proactively flag potential conflicts with the program. Additionally, you may be expected to provide reminders.

At the Camden Coalition, we explain that we do not expect Ambassadors to attend every event we ask them to, but we do expect them to know their own schedule and tell us 'no' if they have another priority at that time.

Time management might look different for individuals that do not have reliable means of transportation. If there are challenges, take time to talk through reliable options, how you will handle tardiness, and how the program lead can support transportation arrangements.

As mentioned in the budget section, transportation is a common barrier, so we recommend having funds to cover those expenses if your program expects ambassadors to be somewhere physically. Overall, this non-traditional workforce will require a higher touch from the program lead to coordinate engagements and coach through new experiences.

Facilitating collaboration

We are confident that community ambassador/liaison infrastructure can serve as a public health asset in true collaboration with residents. Ambassadors can be instrumental in shaping regional plans, identifying barriers to successful implementation, creating awareness and facilitating adoption among demographics who experience health inequities, and providing real-time evaluation for continuous improvement.

A seat at the table in and of itself can feel empowering to community leaders, but it is important that these spaces are mutually beneficial. This requires the program lead to effectively facilitate spaces of collaboration between ambassadors and between ambassadors and organizational and public health leaders.

Ambassador check-ins

After onboarding, maintaining a regular cadence of group check-in meetings enables ambassadors to share what they’re hearing out in the community and provides an opportunity for ambassadors to build a sense of camaraderie.

It is helpful to invite your local health department to sit in on regular check-ins so that they can hear from the community in real-time about things that may impact their efforts. Involving health departments and frontline healthcare providers also ensures the presence of an expert opinion, allowing ambassadors to bring questions directly to them.

Below is an example of the check-in schedule the Camden Coalition uses to maintain relationships and engagement with the various levels of Ambassadors.

Monthly training & check-in rhythm

Date & time	Attendees	Length	Purpose
Week 1	Community Ambassadors Youth Ambassadors	30 min	Facilitate learning between ambassadors by sharing challenges, success stories, and new information.
Week 2	Community Ambassadors Youth Ambassadors Network Ambassadors	60 min	Invite a partner or expert to provide training on a relevant topic.
Week 3	Community Ambassadors Youth Ambassadors	30 min	Facilitate learning between ambassadors by sharing challenges, success stories, and new information.
Week 4	Community Ambassadors Youth Ambassadors Network Ambassadors	30 min	Facilitate learning between ambassadors by sharing challenges, success stories, and new information.

Power dynamics in meetings

We have found that having people from the community and public officials in the same room is beneficial because our Ambassadors know the region better than anyone else. They are passionate, devoted advocates and can offer key insights to the program design.

However, some of the challenges with having public leaders join meetings with people with lived experience are:

- ▶ Some people won't feel empowered to speak if they aren't prepared on topics ahead of time, and public leaders occasionally bring up issues not on the agenda.
- ▶ Sometimes people with lived experience don't feel like they are at the same level as leaders with titles and defer to those who "may know better."
- ▶ Public leaders may speak in a condescending way that does not respect the knowledge and opinion of people with lived experience.
- ▶ Public leaders often have their own motives for meeting with the community, and these can take over a meeting.

This is why preparation is important for authentic community engagement and the inclusion of diverse voices.

First, meet with whoever will be facilitating the meeting ahead of time to review the agenda topics. Ensure they feel confident guiding the conversation back to the agenda if it goes off track or if one person dominates the dialogue. You may want to consider incorporating trainings into your ambassador program like public speaking, asking open-ended questions, and how to have hard conversations.

Make sure to send out the agenda and materials to all participants at least 24 hours in advance. If possible, send them 4-7 days in advance to allow more time for people to see and review them. This helps everyone feel knowledgeable and prepared to speak on the agenda items. When sending the agenda, remind ambassadors that the experience and expertise that they bring to the room is valuable while also informing them of the kind of expertise that the public official may have. Often the areas of expertise are not the same, which allows space for everyone to feel valued.

As an organization, you likely have, or should develop, relationships with public officials ahead of inviting them. This will allow you to have conversations about the value people with lived experience possess and the knowledge they bring. When you invite public officials, make their role in the meeting clear. For example, they can be asked to come and listen, only ask questions related to the content shared by ambassadors, or answer questions directed at them. It is helpful to share the agenda with officials in advance as well so that they know what to expect.

Evaluating impact

Program evaluation is crucial to determining ways to improve your effectiveness and communicate impact to funders. There are several quantitative and qualitative methods that can be used to inform data-driven storytelling and decision-making.

Quantitative data may include how many events ambassadors attend, hours they canvass neighborhoods, or changes to public health rates such as vaccinated people in the target area.

Qualitative data could come from surveys collected before and after training to learn if the content is being understood by ambassadors and surveys at community events to identify topics ambassadors might encounter with community members.

Involving ambassadors in the program evaluation helps improve and tailor the program for each cohort. Being able to communicate impact can ensure sustainable funding for the program.

Our impact story

In three years of running our Community Ambassadors program, the Camden Coalition is proud of the impact it has had in the Camden community – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twice a month, Community Ambassadors meet with staff from the Camden Coalition and New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) to share information they hear from other community members. This feedback is crucial in overcoming barriers in the community.

For instance, our Ambassadors shared feedback that requiring a photo ID to receive a COVID vaccine at state-operated vaccination sites was a significant barrier to community members who did not have ID or had concerns about presenting ID due to their criminal history or immigration status. NJDOH took the Ambassadors' advice and removed mention of photo ID requirements from outreach flyers and changed policies so individuals seeking vaccines would not be turned away if they lacked identification.

By late October 2021, the vaccination rate in the city of Camden reached 70%, an almost 20% increase from three months prior.

“We partnered up with so many organizations for the Camden COVID vaccination effort. From pharmacies to hospitals to school districts, churches, faith-based organizations – you name it, we have done it. And we could not have done this without the Community Ambassadors and their feedback.”

– **Maritza Gomez, Program Manager for Community Engagement and Capacity Building**

Resources

There are several helpful existing sources to draw from when compiling materials for your ambassadors, including:

- ▶ Information from your county and state department of health
- ▶ Internal resources from subject matter experts like your medical director or nursing or social work staff
- ▶ [The CDC website](#)



Next steps & technical assistance

Hopefully this toolkit has provided helpful advice on how to implement a community ambassador/liason program at your organization. Are you ready to get started? Here are some ideas for next steps.

1. Get leadership buy-in.

- ▶ Make sure you have a clear understanding of how this project connects to larger organizational goals and can communicate this to leadership. Consider how a community ambassador project can build on existing work or help achieve a new priority.
- ▶ Present your plan for a community ambassador program to your leadership team. They can:
 - Help figure out the budget aspect of your funding request
 - Give feedback and insight into running the program
 - Have a chance to understand the program's structure

2. Secure funding.

- ▶ Work with your grants or development team to identify potential funders. There are different types of organizations that may wish to support the goals of a community ambassador program through funding, including:
 - Federal, state, and county departments of health, human services, and labor
 - Local hospital community benefits funding
 - Private foundations
- ▶ Be prepared to make a similar case to funders that you did to leadership. Make sure to connect to the funders' goals and priorities this time.
- ▶ Think about sustainable funding for community engagement by writing line items into other program budgets that could support a community ambassador component to that program.

3. Adapt this toolkit to your organization's project goals.

- ▶ Go over the budget with your team
- ▶ Put together a project plan
- ▶ Prepare training material and order supplies for your program
- ▶ Identify external partners to collaborate with

4. Looking for more hands-on help starting a community ambassador program?

- ▶ For technical assistance such as workshops, coaching, and consulting, visit the Camden Coalition website: camdenhealth.org/TA

About the Camden Coalition

We are a multidisciplinary nonprofit working to improve care for people with complex health and social needs in Camden, NJ, and across the country. The Camden Coalition works to advance the field of complex care by implementing person-centered programs and piloting new models that address chronic illness and social barriers to health and wellbeing. Supported by a robust data infrastructure, cross-sector convening, and shared learning, our community-based programs deliver better care to the most vulnerable individuals in Camden and regionally.

Through our National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs (National Center), the Camden Coalition works to build the field of complex care by inspiring people to join the complex care community, connecting complex care practitioners with each other, and supporting the field with tools and resources that move the field of complex care forward.



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