

IN SPIRE's Community

Engagement Learning Network

Ses sion #2: Community-informed information gathering for implementation and impact.

Featured presenter: [HealthierHere](#)

May 2025

Every month, the Community Engagement Learning Network brings together community engagement (CE) professionals and people with lived experience from across the country to host group discussions about improving CE efforts, present best practices for launching and maintaining CE initiatives — drawn from experts in the field, and fosters community-building among participants.



Key takeaways

Authentically centering community in data collection efforts (e.g. surveys, focus groups, and interviews) takes intentional effort to align practices with values. Below are some examples of how HealthierHere operationalized organizational values through specific practices in their Community Voice Listening Project:

Value: Centering and co-designing with people with lived experience

Related practices:

- Involving community in the earliest phases of designing the survey and focus group instruments and giving community the final approval of the tools

- Trusted partners/community members gathered information in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways by folding data collecting into their existing communication channels, community spaces, and planned activities.

Value: Additive not extractive

Related practices:

- The communities and Tribes that contribute to the data all retained ownership of the data including ability to access and utilize it for their purposes
- Doing extensive pre-work to understand and leverage what information and data was already available to avoid asking unnecessary questions

Value: Earn respect and partnership of trusted people and organizations

Related practices:

- Spent time in community to listen and learn and to share who organizational staff are as *people* before coming in with asks
- Partnering with a trusted community-based organization to lead, scope, and design the approach before launching
- Real-time note taking can help to build trust in communities that have experienced past harms through transparency and alignment on what the key messages and take-aways are

Value: Resource the work commensurate to the lift

Related practices:

- Dedicated resources for organizations and people who contributed to the work including resources to support sharing back outcomes through their communities
- Created low-barrier application and reporting requirements to avoid overburdening partners

Value: Implement an ongoing accountability and feedback loop

Related practices:

- Trusted partners approved the final report before it was released publicly
- Hosted community share-back events that included celebration of the collective efforts and time for communities to connect about shared outcomes and themes
- Directly acted on outcomes from the work such as resourcing projects aligned with community needs (e.g. traditional Medicaid, Mental Health First Aid)



Action steps

For people with lived experience

- Before contributing time and information to a data collection effort, decide if the efforts feel authentic and valuable.
 - Ask how outcomes will be shared back with the community and those who contribute data.
 - Ask how community/people with lived experience were involved in co-designing the approach and process.

- Ask for pre-work was done to understand what data is already available and how this data collection effort is unique and additive.
- Ask how community members/people with lived experience will be compensated for their contributions.

For professionals leading CE

- Surveys, interviews, and focus groups do not have to be transactional, low-impact activities. Identify your values for community engagement and map practices to these values, utilizing and adapting the above practices as a model.
- Before beginning data collection efforts include people with lived experience in the earliest phases of planning including designing data collection instruments, outreach plans, and how to meaningfully share back outcomes – dedicate resources to support these activities.
- When joining a community space, listen first, take time to build relationships, show up as your full-self (not just your professional role). Trust is built person to person.

“It’s important for us to do our work in a good way, to do good work, and to be good relatives.”



Resources for additional learning

- [Consumer Voice Listening Project Summary Report](#) – HealthierHere’s final report from the Consumer Voice Listening Project
- [Community Tool Box: Conducting Focus Groups](#) & [Community Tool Box: Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys](#) – Detailed guidance and considerations for thoughtful approaches to community focus groups and surveys

inspire partners

Organizations



People with lived experience



Alan Coker



Burt Pusch



Laura Carroll



Rebecca Esparza



Savina Makalena



Stephanie Burdick