

INSPIRE's Community Engagement Learning Network

Session #5: Expanding impact by having people with lived experience lead grant making

Featured presenter: [CommonSpirit Health](#)

August 2025

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



Key takeaways

- Integrating people with lived experience (PWLE) into the grant making process provides significant opportunity for mutual benefit – by enabling grant makers to identify and resource organizations and proposals that are most inline with community priorities, and by providing capacity and confidence building and tangible changemaking opportunities for the PWLE who are involved.
 - For organizations that do not engage in grant making, similar opportunities for mutual benefit exist by integrating PWLE into upstream processes such as proposal writing and program planning.

- While concepts such as “power sharing” and co-design” may be commonly discussed, they are only brought to life by putting into place intentional activities, processes, and practices supported by necessary resources. For instance:
 - Clearly defining scope, roles and responsibilities for engagement including clearly documented decision-making processes.
 - Feedback mechanisms to identify and address barriers to meaningful engagement.
 - Pathways for individualized support and training to ensure all team members have necessary knowledge and skills to engage in the work.
 - Equitable compensation to acknowledge time, effort and expertise.
 - Flexibility within project workflows and timelines to respond to needs, requests and feedback.
 - Ability to point to specific examples of how engagement has changed – and improved – outcomes of the work.



Action steps

For people with lived experience

- Identify opportunities to deepen influence by pursuing engagement in upstream activities such as grantmaking, grant writing, and/or program planning.
 - Discuss current opportunities with organizations you work with or suggest creating these opportunities if they do not already exist.
 - Be prepared to discuss the benefit these opportunities provide to both the organization and members of their advisory committees/communities.
 - Advise on necessary components of these types of engagement including: compensation, training/preparation, decision making roles/responsibilities, process feedback and improvement, accessibility, and equity considerations.
- If it isn't already common practice for organizations you partner with, ask about the opportunity to discuss feedback or evaluate the community engagement activities you take part in.
 - Included in this process should be chances to discuss or share what is going well in the engagement process and what could be improved. Consider:
 - Do you understand your role and feel adequately prepared to fulfill it?
 - Do you receive the right supports and accommodations?
 - Do you understand if/how your input is integrated into organizational decision making?
 - Do you feel your participation is making a difference?
 - What benefits and positive outcomes do you get from your involvement?
 - What (if anything) could be going better?

For professionals leading CE

- Provide preparation and support for PWLE leading grant making (or other activities such as grant writing, and program planning) including:
 - Ability to opt in/out based on individual capacity.
 - Educational opportunities such as training sessions to discuss grant review process steps and background/context considerations.
 - Opportunity to design grant application requirements and review materials such as timelines and evaluation rubrics.
 - Flexibility in scheduling meetings and alternate ways to engage via recordings and 1:1 touchpoints.
 - Dedicating sufficient resources to support the process – not only in terms of funds for compensation, but also in terms of staff time, training and education, accommodations, and necessary time and flexibility to be authentically responsive.
- If it isn't already common practice for your organization, begin a process of collecting feedback from the PWLE you partner with. This can be done in a formal evaluation process and/or routine feedback conversations and/or anonymous feedback surveys.

“The biggest quality consideration and the value that I find from being involved in this group, is that [our grant making committee] feel that they have true ownership to enact change. It's not just performative, it's not just that we're saying that we're engaging them, but they actually feel like they are leading the work themselves.”



Resources for additional learning

- [Engaging people with lived experience in the grant review process - PMC](#)
- [Best Practices for Inclusive Participatory Budgeting.pdf](#)
- [Report on Power Shifting in Philanthropy Explores Community Engagement | Fund for Shared Insight](#)

inspire partners

Organizations



People with lived experience



Alan Coker



Burt Pusch



Laura Carroll



Rebecca Esparza



Savina Makalena



Stephanie Burdick