

INSPIRE's Community Engagement Learning Network

Session #6: Centering relationship building in recruitment and retention strategies

Featured presenter: [Community Health Plan of Washington](#)

September 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

- Community engagement recruitment that is driven by rigid timelines and performance targets can prioritize a fast rollout, but default recruitment approaches may not be as effective as more intentional, relationship-based efforts.
- Traditional recruitment strategies such as cold calls, texts, and posts of organizational social media accounts can feel impersonal, random, and limit authentic connection making.
- Effective recruitment strategies operationalize the concept “meet people where they are” and they allow time for trust and relationship building.

- Retention – perhaps more accurately described as ongoing relationships and long-term engagement – is a cross-cutting concept that includes consideration of accessibility, trust, value, mutual benefit, and more.
 - Unpacking the concept of retention invites organizations to consider “can PWLE maintain relationships with us and do they want to?”



Action steps

For people with lived experience

- Speak up about lack of representation in the committees, project teams, and conversations you are a part of – whose voices are missing and should be included?
- If it is not already common practice, ask organizations for the opportunity to discuss feedback or evaluate the community engagement activities they take part in.
- Share your insights and recommendations for practices that would improve recruitment and retention such as:
 - Accessibility and accommodations
 - Compensation structures
 - Clarity of your role and responsibilities
 - Training and preparation needs
 - To what extent you understand if/how your input is integrated into organizational decision-making
 - To what extent you feel your participation is making a difference, and what benefits or positive outcomes you receive from your involvement.

For professionals leading CE

- Every community is different, and recruitment approaches should be tailored to meet the needs of local and cultural contexts some strategies to consider are:
 - Engage existing advisory committee and community members to support recruitment efforts leveraging personal connections, their advice on outreach approaches and messages, and the power of ‘word of mouth’ referrals.
 - Consider incentives for frontline staff and existing advisory committee members to refer new members and provide necessary training and materials to ensure that they can accurately discuss the opportunity.
 - Create clear and accessible pathways that make it easy for people to get in touch and refer prospective new members. For instance, a dedicated webpage with a contact form to fill out, that is monitored to ensure timely follow-up.
 - Allow time for trust and relationship building with new communities and partners. Lead with curiosity and demonstrate an interest in getting to know people first, instead of opening with an ask of them.

- Routinely ask council members what they think is missing (e.g., who is missing from recruitment or what topics are not being covered).
- Create inviting and inclusive spaces that acknowledge and seek to balance power differentials. For instance, be mindful of calling professional by their titles while calling PWLE by their first name.
- Prioritize relationship building by creating dedicated social spaces (e.g., a social half-hour before meetings, community meals, or external communication platforms like WhatsApp/Facebook groups).

“Successful engagement begins with meeting our members and communities where they are, and really ensuring that we're tailoring the outreach to reflect their lived experiences, their needs, and their preferences- their unique preferences.”



Resources for additional learning

- [Meet CHPW's Member Advisory Council - Washington State Local Health Insurance - CHPW](#)
- [TIPS FOR RECRUITING PATIENTS AND FAMILIES](#)
- [Creating Authentic, Effective Partnerships Between Organizations and PWLE](#)

inspire partners

Organizations



People with lived experience



Alan Coker



Burt Pusch



Laura Carroll



Rebecca Esparza



Savina Makalena



Stephanie Burdick