

INSPIRE's Community Engagement Learning Network

Session #15: Practical strategies for building an engaged, goal-driven Patient/Family Advisory Council (PFAC).

Featured presenters: [Boston Children's Hospital](#)
July 2026

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

- Before identifying new priorities, organizations should ensure that advisors, staff, and leadership have a common understanding of organizational goals, available resources, past accomplishments, and the role of advisors within the organization.
- Community engagement efforts are more likely to influence organizational decision-making when advisory council goals are intentionally aligned with broader organizational priorities. Demonstrating this helps reduce "us versus them" thinking and positions advisors and organizational leadership as partners working toward shared outcomes.

- Successful goal setting requires acknowledging organizational realities, including limited resources, competing priorities, and unfinished work. Prioritizing achievable goals creates stronger long-term progress than pursuing an overly ambitious wish list.
- Accountability transforms strategic plans into meaningful action. Establishing measurable goals, assigning responsibilities, regularly assessing progress, and sharing results with advisors and leadership helps sustain momentum and demonstrate the value of engagement.
- Closing the feedback loop strengthens trust and organizational credibility. Regularly communicating how advisor input influences decisions reinforces the value of participation, improves member retention, and builds leadership support for community engagement.



Action steps

Start with level-setting, not brainstorming

- Before launching brainstorming activities, dedicate time to "level-setting" so advisors, staff, and organizational leaders begin the planning process with a common understanding of current realities.
- Revisit the purpose and role of advisory councils at the beginning of each planning cycle. Clearly communicate:
 - What advisors are expected to influence
 - How decisions are made
 - The difference between informing decisions and directing organizational work
- Recognize that new members and long-time advisors may have different levels of familiarity with previous work. Providing shared context helps avoid repeatedly generating the same ideas each year.
- Review previous strategic goals and accomplishments before discussing new priorities. Include:
 - Goals that have been completed
 - Ongoing initiatives
 - Projects that were paused or delayed
 - Work that has not yet begun
 - Organizational barriers and available resources

Align advisory council goals with organizational priorities

- Review organizational strategic priorities before developing advisory council goals. Look for opportunities where community engagement activities directly support existing organizational objectives.

- Use strategic planning discussions to strengthen relationships between advisors, staff, and leadership by emphasizing common goals rather than competing interests.

Set realistic priorities instead of pursuing every good idea

- Acknowledge openly that every organization has more worthwhile ideas than available time or resources.
- Evaluate potential goals by considering:
 - Organizational readiness
 - Available staff capacity
 - Existing infrastructure
 - Required resources
 - Potential organizational impact
- Create a "parking lot" for valuable ideas that cannot be addressed immediately. Framing deferred priorities as "not yet" rather than "no" helps maintain enthusiasm while allowing organizations to focus on foundational work first.

Build accountability into every goal

- Break broad strategic priorities into manageable objectives with:
 - Specific action steps
 - Assigned responsibilities
 - Target timelines
 - Success measures
 - Regular progress reviews
- Develop annual or periodic assessment surveys that allow advisors to provide anonymous feedback on their experiences, council effectiveness, and opportunities for improvement.
- Create dashboards or other visual reporting tools that make progress visible throughout the year for advisors, staff, and organizational leaders, rather than waiting until the end of a strategic planning cycle to evaluate success.
- Share assessment findings transparently with advisory council members. Summarize key themes, celebrate successes, acknowledge constructive feedback, and clearly communicate the actions that will be taken in response.

Demonstrate impact and close the feedback loop

- Create dashboards or other visual reporting tools that make progress visible throughout the year for advisors, staff, and organizational leaders, rather than waiting until the end of a strategic planning cycle to evaluate success.
- Develop formal processes for communicating the impact of advisory council work to advisors, organizational leadership, and external partners. Include both quantitative and qualitative elements like:
 - Major projects completed

- Partnerships/projects supported
- Organizational improvements influenced by advisor input
- Stories/testimonials demonstrating advisor impact
- Lessons learned and future priorities
- Invite colleagues and organizational partners to contribute to impact reports by sharing:
 - Project summaries
 - How advisors informed their work
 - Testimonials describing the value of partnership
 - Examples of decisions influenced by community engagement
- Start small if reporting systems do not yet exist. Even a simple one-page summary can begin building organizational awareness and create a foundation for more sophisticated reporting over time.
- Share reports broadly with executive leadership and other stakeholders. Demonstrating how advisory council work advances organizational priorities helps build support for future investment in community engagement activities.
- View impact reporting as an essential part of the engagement cycle rather than a final administrative task. Regular communication reinforces trust, strengthens advisor retention, and creates new opportunities for collaboration.

“The most effective goal setting for us has actually started with establishing shared understanding, not with brainstorming”



Resources for additional learning

- [Creating Goals & Strategy for Engaging People with Lived Experience - INSPIRE](#)
- [Understanding the impact and outcomes of engaging PWLE - INSPIRE](#)
- [Transparent Communication - INSPIRE](#)

inspire partners

Organizations



People with lived experience



Alan
Coker



Burt
Pusch



Laura
Carroll



Rebecca
Esparza



Savina
Makalena



Stephanie
Burdick