COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT©

You and/or your organization arrived here because you want to make a difference in the lived experience of people, and you care about doing it equitably. Welcome! Before we dig into the best practices, let's answer the question why? Why do we need guidance on community partnership? Well, in short, savior complex. Traditional community engagement, albeit mission trips, service learning, the non-profit industrial complex, or a well-meaning initiative, is often rooted in an outsider thinking they know what is best for the community and enacting policies, processes, and procedures that have no relevance or reverence for the community. We are here because we do not want to duplicate problematic engagement. Instead, we want to hang up the savior complex, begin valuing communities as the owners of their intellectual property, treat community members as experts of their own experiences, and establish good faith and trust by truth-telling and reconciliation. We must re-imagine the social in social justice, or the things we do in everyday interactions that humanize each other and prevent discursive, legislative, economic, and physical violence. We also want to engage in efforts that benefit the community more than harm them, benefit the community more than the institution, and are prolonged and prioritize relationship building.

The Community Engagement Tool Kit © is a series of questionnaires, activities, directives, and definitions to assist researchers, organizers, activists, scientists, educators, and practitioners in creating partnerships with community members to conduct research and other activities that bring about change in an equitable way that honors community members experience, history, knowledge, and capacity.

Toolkit Table of Contents

Identifying and Establishing Partnership with a Community of Interest

This tool was created to help researchers and organizations identify their community partners and take what we call a deep dive.

The Deep Dive

One looming question when starting community engagement is how we prepare ourselves to be radically inclusive. Do we do implicit bias training, discrimination training, or another type of training that ensures communities of interest will feel welcome, valued, and incorporated into the team? The answer: take a deep dive approach. Once a community of interest is identified, organizations go through a series of activities, focus groups, and conversations to learn how the specific community has experienced silence, erasure, and/or discursive and physical violence. What this means is that organizations don't waste their time learning general information they likely already know that doesn't give them the details of their community. It is also a chance to get to know their community of interest in great depth, resulting in humanizing their experiences beyond stereotypical ideas of what and who they are. The process of identifying a community of interest to work with includes:

1. Ensuring the processes are equitable and just
2. Ensuring community members are treated as experts of their own experience,
3. Making sure community members feel welcomed so they see themselves as valued partners collaborators, and stakeholders in this process.

So let's dig in! First, what is a community of interest?

Community of Interest

A community of interest is a community your organization would like to work with. It is a community identified by four criteria: impact, place, identity, and affinity.

1. **Impact:** Identify the problem you want to address and then survey which communities are most impacted by the problem. The common phrase that began in disabled communities is "Nothing about us without us." The phrase is meant to ensure the people most impacted by an experience or injustice are involved in the problem solving. When we do not involve those communities most impacted, we run the risk of creating misaligned solutions that, at best, do not alleviate disparities, and, at worst, cause more harm.

2. **Place**: Identify a community that is located within close proximity to your institution/organization/practice so you can be involved for the long haul and start establishing trust.

3. **Identity**: Communities of interests should be unified by one or more social identity categories like race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, nationality, neurodivergence, disability, class, and/or age.

4. **Affinity**: Communities of interests should not just share common social identity categories, but also form around shared interests or common goals. In other words, they have formed a community because of their shared identity and common goals.

When identifying communities of interest, organizations should be as specific as possible when identifying the four criteria above. Doing so will ensure your organization avoids making assumptions about what may or may not bring a community together, or choosing a community because it is trendy or something to be fetishized. The following questions will help you or your organization narrow down your interest to a particular community of interest.

Identifying the Appropriate Community of Interest
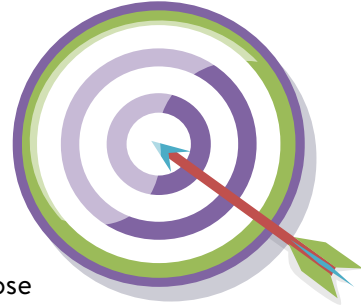
1. What issue am I trying to resolve or mitigate?
2. Who is most impacted by this issue?
3. What are their demographics?
4. Are people associated with the community located in close proximity?
5. What are the most salient social identities that group members share?
6. What are their common goals and interests in working together?
7. What are my motivations for wanting to work with this community of interest?
8. Do I share identities that overlap with this community? If so, which social identities?
9. If the answer is no, is my motivation rooted in a savior mentality? In other words, am I trying to swoop in and save people? Am I working *for* the community or *with*?
10. If I do not share a social identity with this group, and my motivation is not rooted in saviorism, who will I partner with to ensure that someone shares affinity and/or experiences with members of this community to ensure accountability at every step?

Once you have narrowed down your community of interest, use the following questions to determine fit.

1. Is the community of interest considered a vulnerable population that is protected by research laws? If so, what are you doing to ensure they are protected, cared for, and benefitted more than harmed?
2. Does the initiative have the potential to impact and/or burden the community of interest?
3. If the initiative has a potential to impact and/or burden members of the community of interest, is it necessary to form a partnership with them? If so, why?
4. If you answered yes to any of the questions, please proceed to the Research on Vulnerable Populations Toolkit © Yearby 2021.

Impact & Relevance Assessment

Now that you have identified a community to partner with, let's begin assessing whether your initiative or ideas are relevant and have the potential to create the desired impact on everyday lived experience. Use the next three-part process to assess whether your initiative is in alignment with community needs and relevant to their pursuits for change.

1. The researcher should become saturated in existing efforts, reports, and initiatives to avoid repetition, harm, and/or erasure.

2. The researcher should engage with the community (including leaders and community members) to discuss the initial ideas in detail along with their deep data dive to assess relevance and ensure their approach is novel, unique, and in alignment with community needs. To ensure a thorough analysis of impact and relevance, the researcher should exhaust data, including empirical research studies, survey data, focus groups, listening sessions, ethnographic observation, previously collected data, existing reports, and anything else available. This will yield the most comprehensive information required to determine fit, necessity, and possibilities.

3. Then, using all the available data, the researcher and community should answer the following questions:

Disparities:

- ▫ Are there existing disparities?
- ▫ What quantitative and qualitative evidence of disparities exists?
- ▫ What evidence is missing or needed?
- ▫ Will the initiative provide missing or needed information about disparities?
- ▫ Will said disparities be exacerbated by the initiative?
- ▫ Will the initiative address or mitigate disparities? If so, which ones?
- ▫ Does the mitigation outweigh the exacerbation?
- ▫ Is it worth it to the community of interest?

Burdens:

- ▫ What burdens will this initiative place on the community members?
- ▫ Will participation in the initiative exacerbate these burdens?
- ▫ Will the initiative address these burdens?
- ▫ What are the root causes of the burdens, such as racial and class biases?
- ▫ Will participation in the initiative exacerbate these root causes?
- ▫ Will the initiative address these root causes?

Adverse Impacts:

- What potential adverse impacts could result from participation in this initiative?
- Will the adverse impacts further burden the community of interest?
- How could the adverse impacts be prevented or minimized?
- What negative unintended consequences could result from participation in this initiative?
- Will the negative unintended consequences further burden the community of interest?
- How will the negative unintended consequences be prevented or minimized?

Benefits:

- How will the community of interest benefit from the initiative?
- Will the initiative cultivate community-led solutions to address the disparities, burdens, or adverse impacts faced by the community of interest?
- Will the clinical trial provide a solution to address the burdens faced by the vulnerable population(s)?
- Will the initiative cultivate community-led solutions to address the root cause(s) of the issues faced by the community of interest?

Using the answers from these questions, the researcher and community must provide an evidence-based determination of whether the community of interest should be considered for partnership because the initiative will provide benefits to the population, such as eliminating disparities and/or burdens, which outweigh the adverse impacts.
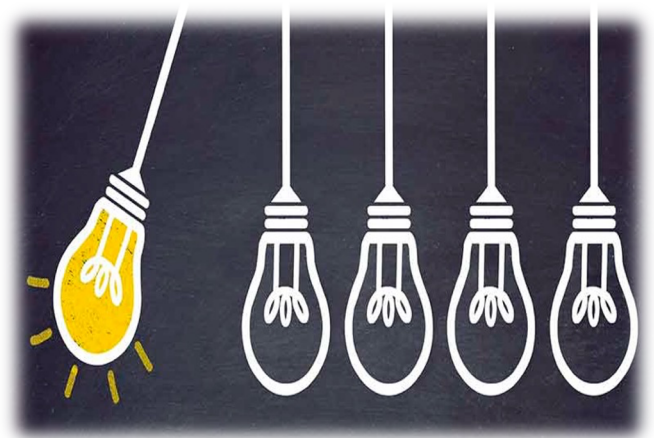
Harm Mitigation Strategy

If the researcher and community of interest decide to partner (even though there is a possibility for adverse impacts) the researcher must develop and implement an evidence-based strategy to minimize the adverse impacts and maximize the benefits received by the community of interest. Payment of money and access to free health care during the trial are not enough to mitigate the adverse impacts.

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Monitoring and Evaluation

1. During the initiative, your organizations should actively monitor the mitigation strategy and the impacts of the initiative on the community of interest to ensure the strategy is effective and the community members are not being overburdened.

2. Once the initiative is completed, the organization should provide evidence that the initiative did not overburden the community of interest and benefited them by addressing disparities or burdens suffered by the community of interest.

Radical Inclusion

How we show up in community is just as important as how we engage communities. Radical Inclusion in the movement for social change captures the difference between having a seat at the table as a tokenized person meant to fulfill a quota versus being valued and engaged beyond stereotypes

and preconceived notions. Radical inclusion asks us to show up as our whole selves, and create space for others to show up as their whole selves without judgment or exclusion through the entire process of idea creation, to implementation, to assessment.

Radical Inclusion is the idea that in order to thrive as humans and organizers, we must think about what it means to be our whole selves and be honest about who we are, what we need, and our boundaries. In order to understand our whole selves, we must be self-reflexive, which requires us to think deeply about what make us unique, and whether we feel comfortable sharing that with others, or if we feel the need to tuck away bits and pieces of us for fear of fitting in, being judged, or being dismissed. The following questions help us begin unpacking the various layers that make you a unique and whole human being who deserves to be radically included.

Who am I?

What matters to me?

How do I practice self-care?

What are my social identities and how do they impact my work?

How do these identities impact how others see me?

What am I leaving out?

When we have to hide bits and pieces of ourselves in order to fit in or feel welcome, we are engaging in invisible labor that sucks our energy and leaves us feeling exhausted. How does compartmentalizing myself increase my personal and invisible labor?

Radical Inclusion is also an external process that asks us to think intentionally about how we show up for other people and how we create space for others who show up as their whole selves, who may have social identities different from our own. The following questions help us to begin sorting through how your organization creates space for other people to coexist in ways that spark positive social change.

Am I inviting diverse others to bring their whole selves to the organization?

Am I engaging them in ways that support their whole selves?

Do I understand their social identities and how they impact their work?

Do I understand my biases towards their social identities and how that impacts how I see their work?

Am I including them throughout the entire process, from idea, to implementation, to assessment?

To become **radically inclusive**, organizations must begin with an invitation before an idea has been set, so that community members feel like **co-creators** of the partnership, the idea, and the endeavor. Organizations must offer **prolonged engagement**. Community members need to feel **valued** as **stakeholders** over the long term and not just pawns who have intellectual property to take advantage of. They must feel like their input, design thinking, experiences, and resources are valued, utilized, and cherished through the entire process, over time. Finally, efforts to grow your organization should feel less like policies meant to fix human interactions without human engagement and more like interventions meant to re-evaluate the way organizations are not only of and by community, but also invested in making structural, interpersonal, and personal changes to ensure community members feel welcomed, valued, and ownership over the entire process. This requires changing not just policies, but people as well. This is the process we refer to as **Humanizing Equity.**

Humanizing Equity

Equity is one of the operationalizable aspects of social justice. It is now considered a policy issue, most organizations that focus on equity focus on generating policies that create a more equitable environment, albeit in the workplace, healthcare, or education system. For example, racial profiling was deemed illegal in the United States because it violated the constitutional promise for equal treatment under the law. While policy cites the illegality of racial profiling, according to the ACLU (2019), racial profiling is still a common practice that undergirds much of the US racism from pain perception in the medical field, to routine dismissal of resumes with "ethnic sounding names," to stop & frisk drills and police brutality. This is an example where changing a policy doesn't change the disposition of a person charged with enforcing the constitution or the way they treat others in their areas of work and life. Various institutions have created "equitable policies" to ensure diversity and inclusion goals were met, people had equal access to resources, and in-house policies did not discriminate based on social identity categories. However, evidence of systemic oppression still exists. So how do we shift from crafting nicely worded policies intended to change organizational and national culture, but do little more than sit on a page in a tucked away file? The answer is humanizing equity.

Many disciplines wrestle with what it means to humanize their field. Albeit health care providers treating patients with respect, dignity, value, and nuance, or educators engaging students as whole people with social, political, and historical contexts, or journalists putting a face to the social issues reported in news, these fields focus on creating a more human connection and understanding between their patients, students, and readers. What these fields all have in common is their desire to address a social problem. The way they humanize the problems are by attaching a face, life, and history to that problem. Equity, however, isn't a problem, it's a solution. Therefore, humanizing equity requires putting a face, life, and history to the solution.

If equity is a goal, then humanizing equity means that those most impacted by a problem should be treated as STAKEHOLDERS and have the MOST say in solution building because it directly impacts their lives and lived experience. If those most impacted by the problem are the creators of the solution, then we are guaranteed to have better, more sustainable solutions that can actually work because they extend from the people most impacted. The problem with how humanization is constructed today is a lack of trust in the community to know their needs, be able to craft solutions, and then evaluate those solutions. Instead, the non-profit and for-profit sectors have relied on token diversity and inclusion hires amidst a culture of whiteness that is far removed from many social

injustices and therefore, incapable of understanding the social injustices that directly impact their constituents, while also buying into stereotypes about marginalized communities, further alienating community members, resulting in distrust on behalf of both parties. Exclusivity is bound to flourish under these conditions. No wonder retention rates among diversity and inclusion hires are abysmal. If a diversity hire becomes the face of a problem, they are easily deemed problematic co-workers who bring up race and gender discrimination too much, resulting in distrust and alienation and eventually termination by one or more parties.

Organizations and institutions must invest in reigniting trust and connection through practices that humanizing equity (i.e. the refusal to put a face to the problem and instead put a face to the solution). If humanizing other disciplines represents seeing those who are suffering more fully, what if we recognized that those who suffer are the most knowledgeable about the material conditions of suffering and therefore the most qualified to offer solutions to mitigate said suffering? We humanize equity by relying on those most impacted by inequity to provide the solutions, and then providing capacity building through:

1. radical inclusion
2. healing justice
3. team building exercises that establish trust and collaborative engagement
4. shifts in cultural and linguistic norms around diversity, inclusion, and equity.

The Tenets of humanizing equity.

1. Humanizing equity is the process of making organizational equity work radically inclusive in action. This requires bringing those bodies most impacted by systemic injustice into the fold and including them throughout the entire process. If organizations are not inviting those most marginalized to create policies that are intended to create equity for those most marginalized, then how will they know their policies are necessary? Additionally, if organizations are not assessing the impact their policies have on actual lived experience of those most marginalized, how will they know their efforts are working? Humanizing equity is the process of being radically inclusive in all of our equity practices to ensure that the work is conceived, devised, implemented and assessed by those most impacted by systemic inequity. This requires valuing people's input, treating them as stakeholders in the outcomes, ensuring that they are co-creators through the process versus experimental groups, and including them throughout the entire process from idea, to implementation, to assessment.

HEALING JUSTICE

"HEALING JUSTICE IS A FRAMEWORK THAT IDENTIFIES HOW WE CAN HOLISTICALLY RESPOND TO AND INTERVENE ON INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE, AND TO BRING COLLECTIVE PRACTICES THAT CAN IMPACT AND TRANSFORM THE CONSEQUENCES OF OPPRESSION ON OUR COLLECTIVE BODIES, HEARTS AND MINDS."
-CARA PAGE

2. In order to be radically inclusive, organizations must create an environment where those most marginalized not only feel safe to contribute and collaborate, but aren't subjected to more harm. This requires healing justice—the intentional healing from past traumas while addressing and eliminating problematic behaviors, policies, and systems that contribute to new traumas. Healing justice captures the importance of leveraging mental health resources so that those most impacted by systemic injustice can heal from the trauma caused by living through those experience daily. If we do not heal through our trauma, we run the risk of repeating it when attempting to craft solutions to systemic injustice. Organizations need to have access to healing justice tools designed to foster a safer, more vibrant workplace and community connection.

HEALING JUSTICE

AN APPROACH TO JUSTICE THAT ENSURES QUALITY PRACTICES, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES THAT FOSTER RECOVERY, RESILIENCE, AND RESUSCITATION IN THE FACE OF TRAUMA AND OTHER HARM CAUSED BY OPPRESSION ARE READILY AVAILABLE AND PROMOTED FOR COMMUNAL AND PERSONAL WELL BEING.

1. ACKNOWLEDGES HEALING AS AN INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNAL ENDEAVOR
2. HONORS VARIOUS MODALITIES OF HEALING
3. INCORPORATES ADVOCACY & CHANGE
4. CHALLENGES APPROPRIATED OPPRESSION
5. **HEALING JUSTICE** SHOULD BE BUILT INTO THE FABRIC OF ALL THAT WE DO. CREATE SPACE FOR REFLECTION, FEEDBACK, GROWTH, AND CARE FOR THE WHOLE PERSON.

3. In addition to healing justice, organizations must also repair relationships devastated by systemic inequity and oppression. Start with team-building exercises that foster a connection between an organization and a community. An organization cannot claim to be radically inclusive if they aren't connected to the communities they claim to serve. In order to generate and maintain a connection across communities of difference, organizations have to be radically inclusive, ensure goodwill, listen actively, and value the community members input and experience. All too often, marginalized others are invited to participate in capacity building exercises where those in power dismiss their narratives, question the integrity of stories about experiences with systemic injustice, and ignore viable solutions only to implement their own solutions assuming they know what is best for the communities they claim to serve. Evident in this style of collaborative partnership is savior complex. The goal should not be to save, but to leverage resources so communities of interest CAN DO for themselves.

4. Cultural and linguistic shifts are important because they evidence sustainable change and ensure we are investing less in diversity and inclusion positions, titles and quotas versus investing more in systemic intervention and structural change. Standard diversity and inclusion practices invest in hiring policies and quotas. They run off the belief that more marginalized bodies in a certain space results in a diverse experience, and that is enough to change an organization's racism or sexism problem. They do not attend to the structural and cultural shifts that must happen in order to retain marginalized bodies, make them feel welcome, engaged, and valued, and ensure that their experiences and input have the most say in change. Cultural shifts require dismantling structural constraints that kept boardrooms white and reimagining solutions by trusting those most close to the problem to dictate the needs and desires of those most close to the problem. It's not just about increasing diverse bodies, but challenging the very idea that a quota was ever the goal. Organizations can realize structural, cultural, and linguistic shifts through prolonged engagement with organizations and a subset of resources.

HUMANIZING EQUITY

AN APPROACH TO EQUITY WORK THAT ENSURES THE MOST MARGINALIZED PEOPLE ARE THE FACE OF THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM.

- HIGHLIGHT THE NEED TO BE RADICALLY INCLUSIVE IN YOUR EQUITY AND HEALING EFFORTS.
- FOREGROUND PEOPLE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITY FIRST.
- ENSURE THAT EQUITY AND HEALING ADVANCEMENTS ALIGN WITH THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS
- PUT A FACE TO THE SOLUTION, NOT JUST THE PROBLEM.

Direction of Power

Those least impacted with the most power make decisions from the top down.

Effectiveness

Enables lightening speed solutions that do not resonate or address community needs.

Solutions

Solutions are ineffective at best, harmful at worst, and almost always miss the mark.

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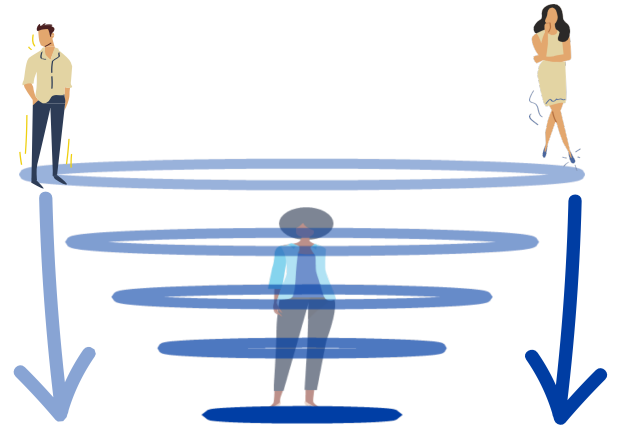
Direction of Power

Those least impacted with the most power make decisions from the top down.

Effectiveness

Enables lightning speed solutions, but they often do not resonate or address community needs.

Solutions

Solutions are ineffective at best, harmful at worst, and almost always miss the mark.

EQUITY AT THE CENTER

- HUMANIZING EQUITY REQUIRES MOVEMENT ORIGINATE FROM THE CENTER

- THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY A SPECIFIC SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION ARE PLACED AT THE CENTER.

- THEY SHOULD BE THE FACE OF THE SOLUTION. AND HELP ASSESS FOR IMPACT

- IMAGINE SOLUTIONS FROM WITHIN, SUPPORT SOLUTIONS FROM OUTSIDE.

IMAGINING SOLUTIONS

SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS

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Humanizing Equity Tool

To ensure your organization is operating from a humanized equity lens, use the following questions:

▫ What Issue are you interested in addressing?

▫ What groups are most impacted by the issue of interest?

▫ Have you identified the community of interest you wish to work with to address the issue? If not, continue to the "Community of Interest" Step, and then return).

▫ What attempts have been made to alleviate the issue by the community of interest?

▫ What successes has the community of interest experienced?

▫ What core values does your community of interest share? (If you have not identified a shared set of core values, proceed to the core values assessment, and then return).

▫ How will your efforts reflect those core values?

▫ What are the current challenges and opportunities?

▫ What community identified goals do you wish to pursue?

▫ How will you build community capacity through your process?

▫ How will you include community members in your ideation, implementation, and assessment?

▫ How will you include community members in your data collection, analyzation, and dissemination?

▫ How will community benefit from dissemination and collected data?

Generating Core Values

Core Values should be the guiding force behind any work rooted in social justice, equity, policy change, or other change-making activities. When we generate shared values, we have a document to refer to when making decisions and evaluating progress. Core values act as a system of checks and balances to ensure that what we are doing is in good faith. Use the following exercise to begin assessing your community of interest's core values and generating alignment.

▫ What are your community of interest's core values?

▫ What are your organization's core values?

▫ Where is there alignment?

▫ Where is there tension?

▫ What plans do you have to generate full alignment?

If you do not have a list of core values to work from, consider doing an exercise I enjoy doing with community partners to learn about core values. I ask each member of the host and community organization to think of time when someone caused their organization or community members harm.

I then instruct them to write the kind of apology letter they wish the entity that caused harm would have written. I then have each person read their letter out loud or share it with me. I extract core values from there letters and populate a list. Then we read through the list to ensure alignment. This exercise is great because it tends to act as a starting place where new ideas and values spring forth. It is also a way to evaluate how community members and organizational partners are in alignment with one another internally and as partners.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is the process of making budgetary decision *with* community instead of *for* community. To engage in participatory budgeting, community partners and organizations should be transparent about the dollar amount of any cash, in-kind donations, and/or volunteer time. Then, working together, the organization and community partners should establish how to allocate the funds, donations, and time to ensure decision-making is community led and informed. Some questions to begin the process include:

- How much money do we have to spend?
- What kinds of donations do we have to use?
- How many volunteer hours do we have to spare?
- Who is doing the bulk of the volunteering?
- How are we compensating people for their intellectual, physical, and emotional labor?
- What goals require money to achieve?
- What goes require human resources?
- What goals require material goods?
- How will we prioritize these goals?
- What constraints are at play? For instance, does the community, granting institution, or grantee's institution have constraints or stipulations regarding how money can be allocated?
- How will we address those constraints so that the community feels valued, seen, and capable?

Engagement 101

Congratulations! You have partnered with your community of interest and you're ready to get to work! These next steps are all about ensuring you and your organization have the tools to interact with people in ways that foster trust, establish strong relationships, and cultivate brave spaces where people feel empowered and safe to participate in change. Use these tools to take inventory on the current status of your organizational history and relationship with your community of interest and to develop compassionate communication and facilitation skills that foster more meaningful interaction.

A Word

"If we want to heal, we must tell the truth."
- Pauli Murray (1910-1985)

Establishing Trust and Good Will

- ▫ Has your organization done harm to your community of interest?
- ▫ If so, what kinds of harm have been caused?
- ▫ How do community members remember the harm?
- ▫ How do they feel about the harm?
- ▫ What stories do they tell about the harm?
- ▫ What has been done to right the harm?
- ▫ What will you do to right the harm and prevent future harm?

Modeling Tone Setting

Cultivating Brave Space
- Take active listening seriously
- Suspend judgement
- Remember that respect is complex
- Focus on complexity
- Embrace vulnerability
- Challenge your biases
- Don't be diverted by appearance and delivery

Acknowledging Intent and Impact
- Affirm Feelings
- Assume Good Intent
- Acknowledge your impact
- Shoulder accountability
- Power is Intersectional

Honouring Failure
- Exercise grace and compassion
- Be gentle with yourself and others
- Lean into the discomfort
- The learning edge is your friend
- Failure is inescapable

Tone-Setting

One of the important things about working in community is establishing a common language and understanding around how you will treat each other. We do this through tone setting. At the onset of your first interactions, talk about cultivating a brave space, acknowledging intent and impact, and honoring failure.

Cultivating brave space is a response to the idea of a safe space. Scholars, practitioners, organizations, activists, and academics agree that there's no such thing as 'a safe space'. A safe space assumes we are free from discomfort and harm. But we know that when working with humans, we cannot create or anticipate spaces that are completely comfortable. Instead, cultivate what Brené Brown calls a brave space.

A brave space is a space where we acknowledge the vulnerability and openness required to cultivate change, we sit in our discomfort, and we allow our minds to stretch to hold the complexity and nuance of human experience. When we create brave spaces, we recognize that our experience is not the only experience, and that we might learn things that stretch us, make us pause, and/or require a deep breath. To cultivate a brave space, organizers should suspend judgment while listening actively. We are attentive to the complexity of what someone is saying versus how they're saying it. We also remember that respect is complex. We can respect each other and hold space for disagreement. We focus on complexity. Human beings are extremely messy, walking, talking contradictions. When we hold space for that complexity, it is easier to understand how human beings can do things that seem directly contradictory or completely change their minds. In brave spaces we embrace vulnerability and recognize that we have to choose to explore our emotions, understand our teammates emotions, and lean in to the uncertainty. We also challenge our biases and try to be mindful of the ways our

biases prevent us from understanding each other wholly and fully. This means we take the time to evaluate why we assume the worst in some and the best in others, or why we respond to people differently because of how they look, how they show up, or how they speak. Finally, we choose not to be diverted by how people look and how they speak. We can learn something from every encounter if we choose to see beyond our biases and recognize the full humanity in each other.

Acknowledging intent and impact is all about not absolving ourselves of the consequences of our actions and holding a big enough space to carry the weight of our complex emotions. When we acknowledge intent and impact, we affirm each other's feelings without dismissal or tone policing, we assume good intent while also acknowledging how something coming from a place of good will can still cause harm. We acknowledge the impact of our words and actions, shoulder the accountability when we do cause issues, and remember that power is intersectional. Not all privileges and power translate to different spaces or places. Additionally, having one kind of privilege (perhaps race) doesn't negate other identities that are oppressed or marginalized (like growing up poor or living with a disability).

We also **honor failure.** Failure is a place of possibility where growth thrives. For instance, when Arthur Fry and Spencer Silver set out to make the strongest adhesive, they failed. But that failure led to the post-it note, one of the most widely used office supplies of all time. Failure can lead us down paths we didn't know existed. In brave space, we honor failure by exercising grace and compassion, being gentle with ourselves and others when we make mistakes, leaning into discomfort, approaching the learning edge because that is where we grow, and recognizing that failure is imminent.

Communication with Compassion

When we communicate with our community partners, it is important that our communication styles reflect the fact that we value and appreciate our community partners because of difference, not in spite of difference. When we communicate and offer support in inclusive ways, we show our community partners that we walk the walk and talk the talk. Puns intended. Inclusive communication is sensitive and open to difference. For instance, using gender neutral language ensures everyone can see themselves in your vision. Inclusive communication is also flexible. We create space for being called in and stretching our minds because we know that we do not know everything, nor can we anticipate everything. Being flexible ensures we can respond in beneficial ways that are in alignment with our core values. Inclusive communication is also graceful, compassionate, and humble. When someone corrects your behavior or language, thank them. People do not correct you when they don't think you have the capacity to change. Honor the corrections as a gift full of possibility for growth.

Inclusive Communication

Language
Be inclusive, sensitive, and open to dialogue. Be thankful for corrections.

Approach
Approach this work with grace, compassion, and a desire to be better.

Flexibility
Approach living, teaching and learning with flexibility to create space for what you may have missed, unexpected crisis, etc.

Humility
Say thank when corrected and eliminate excuses, dismissive language, and judgement.

Sensitivity
Be sensitive to difference fully recognizing that you will never know everything, but learning some makes you a better provider.

CORE VALUES

Navigating Difficult Conversations

When engaging with community partners, you may find yourself or your organization navigating difficult conversations. Keep in mind you have set the tone for how to handle communication, and mis-communication. Additionally, facilitating conversations as a dialogue while offering support is a game changer when handling difficult times. Dialogue is a form of conversations that highlights understanding as the goal, not winning or persuading. When we engage in dialogue, we listen to understand each other without judgment, we validate each other's experiences and feelings, we articulate areas of conflict or different with the intent to build shared meaning, we build relationships, and we honor silence.

Debate	Discussion	Dialogue
Goal	**Goal**	**Goal**
Defeat other's positions	Persuade others while avoiding conflict	Listen to and understand each other
Characteristics	**Characteristics**	**Characteristics**
Listen with a view of countering	Listen for places of disagreement	Listen without judgment and with a view to understand
Discount the validity of feelings	Try to avoid surfacing feelings	Validate other's experiences and feelings
Focus on conflict and difference as advantage	Avoid areas of strong conflict and difference	Articulate areas of conflict and difference
Disregard relationships	Retain relationships	Build relationships
Use silence to gain advantage	Avoid silence	Honor silence

Adapted from Tanya Kachwaha (2002), Huan-Nissan (1999) & Consultant/Trainers Southwest (1992)

Supportive communication looks like verbalizing affirmation. Statements and questions like "I see you," "I believe you," "I am sorry that happened to you," What do you need," and "How can I support you," signal support. Sometimes our conversation partners are overwhelmed. In those moments, we do not ask what they need, but rather offer how we can help and ask if it will indeed be helpful with a question like, "I can offer ____, will that be helpful?"

Offering Support

I See You
I Value You
I Believe You

I am sorry that happened to you.

Supportive Language

What do you need? How can I support you?

Here is what I can do... will that be helpful?
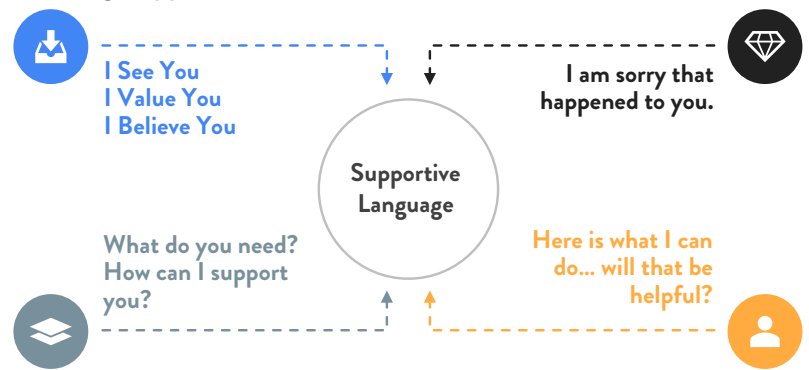
How to Apologize Effectively

As you begin working with people from different backgrounds with different communication styles and needs, it is imperative that you learn to apologize because mistakes will happen. This tool is about learning how to apologize effectively and respond to situations when they occur immediately and with sincerity, compassion, and integrity. Doing so can eliminate long-term issues. Additionally, knowing how to apologize is a great first step in engagement because we are bound to make mistakes and we are responsible for repairing harm.

Common mistakes in apologies look like dismissal, a lack of accountability, excuses, and a refusal to accept responsibility. Statements like "I am sorry you feel offended," "I am sure they didn't mean it or intend to offend," or apologizing to the wrong person, misplacing blame, or dismissing the gravity of the situation with language like, "We missed the mark," signal a lack of understanding and intentionality. Instead, use the graphic below to offer strong apologies.

> Apologies should be just as loud as the harm and utilize the same platform.

> Apologies should acknowledge the direct harm caused.

> Apologies should connect said harm to history and contemporary ramifications.

> Apologies should incorporate action items to do better

> Apologies should follow-up with a change in behavior!

> Strong apologies use I and we language.

> Strong apologies avoid scape goats.

> Strong apologies avoid excuses.

> Strong apologies do not dismiss intent by avoidance.

> Strong apologies are vulnerable.

> Strong apologies are brave.

> Strong apologies are clear.

> Strong apologies reflect core values.

You are off to a great start if you made it this far! The final steps to equitable community engagement are about the process of working together. The last three tools are designed to help you and your community partners work through logistics like expectations, time-lines, evaluation, and disseminating deliverables.

Generating a Time-Line for Prolonged Engagement

▫ How often do we want to share space?

▫ What kinds of accommodations are required to ensure full participation?

▫ Do community partners require child care, food, and/or transportation to participate?

▫ Do community members require any safety measures?

▫ Do those safety measures pose a threat?

▫ Does the engagement need to take place virtually, in-person, or in a hybrid format?

▫ If taking place virtually, do community members have sufficient equipment and internet connection to participate?

▫ If taking place physically, is the space ADA compliant and accessible?

Evaluation and Feedback Metrics for continued success and accountability

▫ How will you ensure your methods, interactions, and outcomes are in alignment with community expectations and doing the work you set out to do?

▫ Who will have access to evaluation data?

Accessible Dissemination

▫ How will you share the outcomes of your initiative?
Will community be a part of the publication process?
Will they receive publication credit?

▫ How will you benefit from publishing outcomes?

▫ How will community benefit from this?

▫ Have you checked for potential backlash to community members if you publish the outcomes?

▫ What are you doing to ensure there is no backlash if issues arise?
What formats will your organization use to publish your outcomes?

▫ Are those formats accessible and free of charge?

▫ Are they written or recorded for a wide audience with varying degrees of media and information literacy?