



NCJA Center for
Justice Planning

Guidance Series:
**Meaningful Community
Engagement in
Public Safety Funding**



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Overview:

Increasing access to public safety funding is just one important tool for addressing the vast disparities in the criminal justice system. Acknowledging that meaningful criminal justice improvement must be informed by the expertise of those most impacted, many state and local agencies are looking for new and inclusive ways to build trust and meaningfully engage community in their planning and funding processes. The first step in building foundational trust includes cultivating genuine and meaningful relationships.

Launched in 2023, the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) Board of Directors Equity in Public Safety Funding and Budgeting Committee aims to holistically address equity in public safety funding and budgeting. The committee works to advance meaningful relationships and collaborative partnerships between government agencies/system partners and their community partners—and more broadly—the communities they serve.

The Committee’s Mission Statement:

*Develop guidance for the purpose of creating **meaningful** relationships between community organizations, historically devalued communities and **funders/decision makers** to better determine and leverage access and resources to effectively advance public safety and equity in the criminal justice system.*

This committee is comprised of diverse stakeholders who have worked diligently over the past year through monthly meetings and a two-day in-person workshop to brainstorm and develop a series of five guidance documents on how to be more equitable and community-focused when making funding decisions on public safety initiatives. The five guidance chapters developed by the committee include:



Defining Community Engagement Within Public Safety Funding Decisions



Public Safety Funders and System Partners:
Key Insights and Recommendations from Community Partners on How to Engage the Community in a Meaningful Way

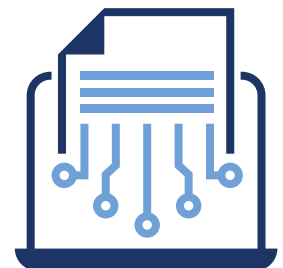


Community Partners:
Key Insights and Recommendations for Engaging with System Partners for Public Safety Funding



Language Matters:
Language Tips for Successful Engagement

- ▶ Person First Language and Other Recommendations for Inclusivity and Access
- ▶ Language Access Planning: Best Practices



Equity And Evaluation:
Making Evaluation and Data Collection Accessible and Effective

Key Terms and Definitions:



System partners:

Government agencies, particularly those in the criminal justice system. For this document's purposes, this typically includes agencies who administer grants and/or make public safety budget and funding decisions.



NCJA's Definition of Equity:

Equity is the intentional practice of change to actualize fair treatment, advancement, access and opportunity for all to thrive.



State Administering Agencies (SAAs):

With a structure and process that varies by state, these agencies use strategic planning to analyze crime trends, evaluate the priorities of all segments of the criminal justice system, set out a plan for reducing crime and victimization and guide the use of federal criminal justice grant funds.



Language Access:

Effective strategies to engage and communicate with individuals with communication needs, acknowledging language is not a barrier.



Community Partners:

Organizations or individuals with a stake in the community ranging from substance-use treatment centers, mental healthcare providers, violence prevention interventionists and other non-profits who help those who have been affected by harm. In addition to engaging service providers and organizational partners, it is crucial to involve a broader range of community members, including crime survivors and general community participants. Those with lived experience, whether formerly justice-impacted individuals and/or crime survivors, are essential to system processes.

Who Are We to Define Community?

Community lies at the heart of our work as system partners and community-based organizations. Together as a committee, we have strived to thoughtfully define the terms used throughout our work, ensuring authenticity and clarity. While the concept of community is complex and multifaceted, we believe it is vital to highlight its key elements. To us, community transcends physical location and embodies a shared sense of identity and support. Recognizing the diversity and unique experiences within communities, we aim to foster connections and mutual assistance while addressing historical traumas and implementing policies that empower rather than marginalize.

After several focused discussions on how we should define "community," we reached an organic consensus that the definition of community must come directly from the community itself. We invite partners, practitioners, providers and system professionals to come together and uniquely define community as it best fits their individual needs, characteristics, strengths and challenges.

A Special Thanks to the Committee Members:

- ▶ **Delrice Adams**, Executive Director of Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), *Committee Chair*
- ▶ **Heather Warnken**, Executive Director, Center for Criminal Justice Reform, University of Baltimore School of Law
- ▶ **Jennifer Brinkman**, Director, Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration/Office of Criminal Justice Programs
- ▶ **Joe Thome**, Former Director, Colorado Director of Criminal Justice, Department of Public Safety
- ▶ **Kahlee Griffey**, Co-Founder/Co-Executive Director, Until We Are Free
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- ▶ **Kevin Reese**, Co-Founder/Co-Executive Director, Until We Are Free
- ▶ **Kristina Lewis**, Tribal Liaison, Western Sky Community Care
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- ▶ **Omara Rivera- Vázquez**, Ph.D, Director, Center for Equity and Justice, St. Michael's College
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- ▶ **Sandra Sykes**, Executive Director, New Life Community Center, Richmond Virginia
- ▶ **Scott McLaren**, Deputy Director, Delaware Criminal Justice Council
- ▶ **Shannon Dion**, Director, Virginia Victims Fund

CHAPTER 1:

Public Safety Funders and System Partners: Key Insights and Recommendations from Community Partners on How to Engage the Community in a Meaningful Way

Below are recommendations from a community lens addressing how system partners and government agencies can most effectively and meaningfully engage with community partners. **The committee has stated very strongly that it is the duty of the system partner or government agency to take the first step to establish or repair relationships and build or regain trust within the community.**



WHY?

Why Should Criminal Justice System Partners Engage Community Partners When Making Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

The answer may seem obvious, but clearly defining and understanding this 'why' is the first step to creating genuine partnerships.

1. Investments should directly impact the lives of community members and be informed on the front end by those most impacted by the issue being addressed.
2. "Nothing about us without us." Supporting communities with community input and feedback, and the overall co-creation of key decisions, maximizes outcomes and increases sustainability.
3. While violence is often concentrated, violence also impacts the whole community. The whole community must have the opportunity to be a part of the solutions to reducing violence.
4. It is important to build trust where trust does not exist. This is especially important and most effective when things feel stable, so that when high profile events and urgent public safety needs arise, trusting relationships are already established and can be leveraged.
5. Setting a precedent to help with the sustainability of present and future funding.
6. Diversity in thought and experiences creates better results.



HOW?

How do System Partners Engage with the Community in Terms of Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

Community engagement can often appear or feel like a “check the box” exercise. It’s important that community engagement is conducted with intention, thought and authenticity, recognizing that community is not a monolith.

1. Understand and acknowledge the power dynamics between system partners and the community. Dig in—gain further understanding by hearing the community perspective on this.
2. Humanize your processes. Understand that actual human lives are impacted by every funded program and policy decision and treat them with corresponding care.
3. Ensure equitable representation in the planning processes (i.e., don’t have 10 system partners and one community member represented in planning processes and meetings).
4. Compensate community partners for their time and expertise.
5. Listen! Listen! Listen! Especially important given the frequent power imbalance, an aspiration for system partners is to listen more than you speak.
6. Be transparent and honest.
7. Understand capacity and resources of community partners vs. system partners.
8. Community partners should be treated as subject matter experts, and lived experience and front-line knowledge should be considered invaluable forms of expertise.
9. Begin engagement early and often. Do not wait until decisions have already been made to include community partners; recognize the difference between inclusion versus true co-creation.
10. Understand the pressures that executive directors of community-based organizations face. For example, often community-based organization executive directors spend much of their time fundraising, tending to urgent concerns and wearing multiple hats simultaneously to address their organization’s many high priority needs. Executive directors of small grassroots organizations often wear every single hat. If executive directors are not compensated for their time, they may need to redirect their efforts to areas where they can obtain compensation for their organization.
11. Be the one to initiate the outreach; system partners, where possible, should go to community partners first and be receptive when they are approached.
12. Create a space for equal partnership (i.e., do not create an environment where CBOs feel compelled to beg for funding or can’t communicate openly about their thoughts and needs without jeopardizing their interests). Make it clear to everyone that system partners should rely upon and work in service to community partners as much as the other way around.
13. Ensure a consistent communication loop. Do not request feedback and move on without further communication.
14. Understand “community” is not a monolith, but rather comprised of various subcommunities, unique voices and perspectives that can vary greatly. Pursue continuous understanding of the landscape in your jurisdiction(s).
15. Language matters (see our guide on language matters).

WHO?

Who Should System Partners Engage in the Community in Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

As a committee focused on equity, who we are engaging is essential to the work we do. In addition to who we traditionally include, we want to ensure that non-traditional partners and historically disadvantaged and marginalized populations are included in funding decisions. Partners to engage may include, but are not limited to:

1. Grassroots organizations or community groups, including those doing work in the equity space.
2. Reentry organizations, including those partnering with local and state corrections.
3. Non-profit coalitions.
4. Tribal affiliated organizations/groups.
5. Groups that have not received funding in the past.
6. Those with lived experience in the criminal legal system.
7. Community behavioral health partners.
8. Related issue-based coalitions, such as those focused on mental health, substance use disorders and/or reducing poverty.
9. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).
10. Local chambers of commerce (including those geared toward marginalized populations).
11. Housing coalitions that provide support to unhoused individuals.
12. Local health districts.
13. Neighborhood associations.
14. Law enforcement community engagement task forces.
15. Faith-based leaders.
16. Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE).
17. Quasi-governmental commissions.
18. Public defender offices (often an underfunded system partner).

WHAT?

What Topics Should System Partners Engage Community Partners on in Funding and Budgeting Processes?

What processes/activities/decisions should the community be engaged in regarding funding and budgeting decisions?

1. Board member engagement for final review of funding decisions/recommendations.
2. Budgeting processes—feedback on allocations, priority areas of focus and budget requirements for funding applications.
3. Convening community stakeholders to inform final funding decisions/recommendations.
4. Community meetings—transparent, consistent communication and comprehensive information provided.
5. Compensate community members for their expertise—providing testimony at community meetings, reviewing funding proposals, participation in focus groups, etc.
6. Development of funding proposal rubrics/scoring criteria—collaboratively develop and seek feedback from community on proposed rating criteria.
7. Development of outcome measures—include community voice and allow flexibility on definition of success; develop outcome measures collaboratively with community members and funded partners.
8. Eligibility criteria and guidelines (flexibility in requirements assists in advancing equity)

9. Focus groups/town halls/open discussions.
10. Meaningful engagement—engagement with express intent to utilize feedback and provide follow up communication.
11. Prioritize robust, diverse engagement—who is in the room? Who is not in the room? Who has not been engaged in the past?
12. Prioritize language access (see relevant sections below).
13. Reporting requirements—collaboratively develop reporting requirements, including data and reporting frequency/cadence. Engage partners to collaboratively develop reports/reporting products that are multi-use and mutually beneficial for funders and partners.
14. Strategic planning processes—include priority identification for funding and resources.
15. Subaward application review process—ensure community voices are engaged to inform the process.
16. Request for Proposal (RFP) and/or other procurement processes—engage the community in document development and review processes.
17. Timeline on outcome measures—develop a shared understanding of what successful outcomes look like and how long it may take to achieve them.



WHEN?

When and How Often Should System Partners Engage with the Community?

Engagement must be done at the right time(s) and in an ongoing way to ensure its effectiveness.

1. Year-round effort.
2. Strategic planning initiatives.
3. Development of funding priorities for budget season.
4. Development of grants administration policies and procedures.
5. Development of data collection requirements for funded projects and programs.
6. Prior to budget finalization.
7. Through full-time community engagement staff (are they able to be physically present in the community regularly?)
 - a. Ensure there are support systems for community engagement positions so that all is not lost when a person leaves the position or leadership turnover impacts the prioritization of these goals.
8. Practice endless engagement, patience and humility in the face of barriers.
9. Frequent engagement is key, not just for funding announcements.

CHAPTER 2:

Community Partners: Key Insights and Recommendations for Engaging with System Partners for Public Safety Funding

Below are recommendations from system partners on how community partners and community-based organizations can meaningfully engage with system partners and public safety funders. **The committee has stated very strongly that it is the duty of the system partner or government agency to make the first step in trying to begin or repair relationships with the community and to build or repair trust among community agencies.** This document is simply to assist community partners who may want to engage with their system partners but are not sure where to begin.



WHY?

Why Should Community Partners Engage with Criminal Justice System Partners When Making Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

Understanding why community partners should engage with the criminal justice system and system partners might seem obvious but is the first step to creating genuine partnerships.

1. Funding should directly benefit individuals and communities most impacted by the justice system and/or violent crime.
2. There are resources available by system partners and system funding that community-based organizations can use or access through collaborative efforts.
3. Engagement can build relationships and establish trust.
4. Through collaboration, both system partners and community partners have the power to educate one another on what may be unseen needs of the community.
5. Community partners can be introduced to other system partners who they may not have engaged with or did not think to engage with previously.
6. System partners can help community partners understand and navigate grant requirements and guidelines when applying.
7. Establishing open lines of communication can pay dividends, and it is often best to have an existing partnership/relationship rather than start when you need something.
8. Through engagement, system partners are able to hear common challenges faced by community-based organizations—this feedback can inform processes as well as funding source creation and distribution.

HOW?

How Should Community Partners Engage with the Criminal Justice System in Terms of Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

Engaging with system partners can be challenging, intimidating and sometimes fraught with trauma and assumptions from past experiences. Some key engagement recommendations include:

1. Understand and get to know the system partners you work with as individuals and real human beings doing a job, rather than seeing them solely as an extension of the system.
2. Find a champion who is willing to challenge traditional methods and avoid or push back on the status quo or “that’s how we have always done it” mindset.
3. Seek out public meetings: board meetings, advisory group meetings, town halls, legislative sessions. Face-to-face interaction is often productive and can generate lots of responses in-person.
4. Though system partners should initiate communication, it is okay and can even be beneficial for a community organization to initiate engagement.
5. Understand that the government can move slowly, but that small changes over time often lead to big changes.
6. Find areas of shared interests, aiming for mutually positive results.
7. Understand pressures on system partners; the reality is that to give, they must often have to take from other areas.
8. System partners are often mission-focused individuals who must fight internally to make institutional changes.
9. Both system partners and community partners need to understand their roles and expectations. Clear roles enable you to leverage one another and collaborate effectively to bring about change.

WHO?

Who Should Community Partners Engage Among System Partners in Funding and Budgeting Decisions?

As a committee focused on equity, who we are engaging is essential to the work we do.

1. State Administering Agencies (SAAs). [These state agencies](#) are the state criminal justice planning agencies who also manage state and federal grant funds.
2. County and city grant offices.
3. County and city officials.
4. Public defenders and indigent defense.
5. District attorneys.
6. State attorneys.
7. State officials.
8. Local elected officials (county and city commissioners, mayors, sheriffs).
9. Long established and currently system-funded community-based organizations who can be a tremendous source of guidance.
10. State and national coalitions, for example, the National Alliance on Mental Health.
11. Race and equity offices within government entities.
12. State and local victim services offices.
13. Intermediary organizations (organizations that often serve as the go between for government agencies and non-profits).
14. State legislators.
15. Foundations and philanthropic organizations.
16. The Office of Justice Programs within the U.S. Department of Justice.

Note: It can be helpful for community-based organizations to understand the chain of command (structure and hierarchy) to better understand how best to engage and advocate for change. Community partners should leverage their system contacts to navigate governmental structures.

WHAT?

What Processes and Activities Should Community Partners Engage with System Partners on?

What processes/activities/decisions should the community be engaged in regarding funding and budgeting decisions?

1. Government agency strategic planning initiatives.
2. Surveys, focus groups, bidding conferences.
3. Budgeting processes if available.
4. Development of grant solicitations and/or processes.
5. Development of performance metrics for funding received.
6. Make a case for more qualitative data and sharing stories, which should go hand in hand with quantitative data collection.
7. Showcase the data your agency already collects for the program/funded initiative (additional guidance on evaluation found below in Chapter 5).
8. If necessary, use Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Open Records laws to justify requests for documents (grant applications, grant reports, etc.).
9. Sharing reports and success stories with system partners communicates impact and amplifies the value of the program and organization.
10. Training opportunities, conferences or convenings. Ask if scholarships are available to attend or for travel costs, and advocate for this if they are not available.
11. Request feedback on grant applications or request examples of what has been funded or has seen success.
12. Previous funding is credible to state agencies who evaluate financial “risk”—showing what worked for other community organizations if you haven’t been funded can help your case when applying.
13. Ask system partners when their next “listening session” is, or when their next open meeting is for public comments, and advocate for these opportunities if not readily available.

WHEN?

When Should Community Partners Focus on Engagement with System Partners?

When is the right time for engagement with system partners? It is important for community partners to find out the timing of funding decisions within their own jurisdictions as the exact time will differ from state to state and county to county.

1. Engage regularly—forming a genuine relationship or partnership means having an ongoing relationship, not just in times of need.
2. During solicitation season, often spring and fall.
3. Just ahead of the start and end of the government’s fiscal year. This is often when budgets are set and programs are evaluated for continued funding.
4. Upon initial receipt of funding to discuss the relationship, expectations and data collection requirements.
5. Throughout the grant close out process to receive feedback for the next cycle.
6. During legislative session.
7. After big successes! It is appropriate, needed, and beneficial to make sure system partners in the jurisdiction are aware of the great work that is being done through communication of program stories and data, as well as challenges faced along the way.

CHAPTER 3:

Language Matters: Language Tips for Successful Engagement

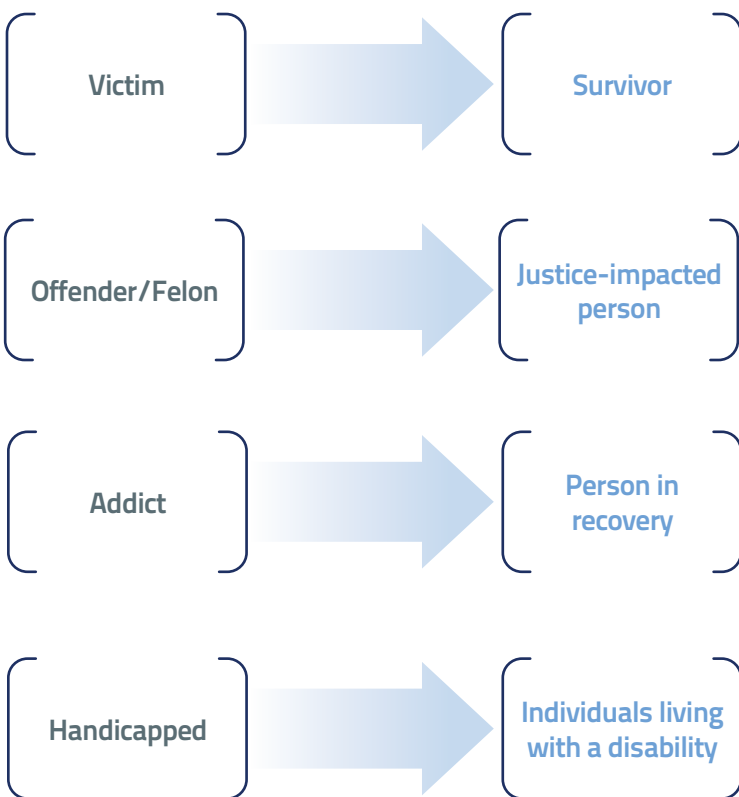
The following recommendations outline specific strategies for system partners and government agencies to actively and meaningfully collaborate with community partners while ensuring inclusivity and equity in practices through the use of language.

The roots of oppression can be traced back to the way language is used. The power structure in society is often mirrored in the language that is employed. The verbiage used reflects the values that are upheld in a given context.

The effective use of language is critical for facilitating communication and ensuring that all individuals have an equal opportunity to express themselves. This is essential for creating an environment within your organization that consistently demonstrates and promotes equity.

It is crucial to be conscientious about the language incorporated into both verbal communication and written publications. Language has the power to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity rather than causing feelings of isolation. Remaining informed about the evolving cultural and societal norms in language usage is imperative. It is essential to be sensitive to trauma and to ensure that the language employed is not hurtful, exclusionary or perpetuating stigma. Utilizing language that acknowledges and addresses an individual's or a community's experiences of trauma and oppression is of the utmost importance.

Below are examples of commonly used terms that can be divisive or offensive, and some alternative terms that may be more trauma and person-centered.



An additional term that is often misused by system partners when referring to collaborative efforts between community-violence intervention (CVI) professionals and law enforcement is the phrase "working with." This term can be especially dangerous as it can harm the credibility of the CVI worker. The term "professional understanding" is preferred. Our system is designed to adapt and respond to the ever-changing landscape of modern society. As societal norms and structures evolve, our language and terminology must also evolve to reflect these changes. The overarching goal is to shift towards a more person-centered approach and to incorporate trauma-informed principles into our communication practices. These two resources, [Advancing Pretrial Policy and Research: Language Guide document](#) and [The Marshall Project's Language Project](#) are great resources on person-centered language through the lens of pretrial programs. Additionally, it is important to note that language choices can be received differently by individuals and communities. For example, what one person or community may feel is person-centered and acceptable, another person or community may find offensive. It's okay to ask, learn, and grow. It's important to note that while some terms may be offensive to some people, they may be widely accepted by others. Language is not fixed, and what is acceptable or unacceptable should be considered on a case-by-case basis, and something that can and should be revisited over time.

Language serves as a valuable teaching tool, allowing us to educate others who can then share their knowledge with others. It's important to approach language with curiosity, the willingness to adapt and humility to truly understand its nuances. Establishing a foundation of respect is crucial, as it sets the stage for meaningful communication. Building trust and nurturing relationships is key to ensuring that our language is interpreted and received as intended, minimizing the risk of misunderstandings.

CHAPTER 4: Language Access Tips for Successful Engagement

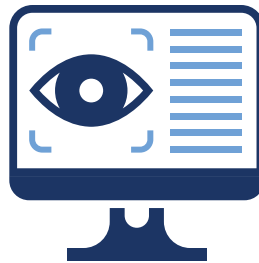
Meaningful Access The provision of language assistance aims to ensure that individuals who speak or sign languages other than English receive accurate, timely and effective communication at no expense to the individuals receiving the assistance. Meaningful access for these individuals means that they should not face significant restrictions, delays or inferior treatment compared to English-proficient individuals when accessing programs or activities.

When communicating with diverse audiences, it is crucial to select suitable platforms that take into account both the medium and language. Meaningful language access can come in different forms. Below are some recommendations:



Community Partnerships:

Collaborate with trusted organizations that speak the languages your target audience uses.



Online Videos and Social Media:

Freely accessible content with captions or translations in other languages.



If Offering Online Services:

Include a call-in number with interpretation services. This ensures accessibility for those who need language assistance.



Door-to-Door Outreach and Community Events:

Person-to-person contact with bilingual staff or community volunteers.



Visual Icons/Symbols:

Universal symbols, like stop signs, can convey meaning across languages.



Radio Communications:

These can be effective for reaching large audiences with spoken messages.

What is Language Justice?

Language justice is a framework that opposes the idea of one language being superior to others.¹ It acknowledges that language can be used as a tool of oppression and emphasizes the significance of language in exercising autonomy and advancing racial and social justice. This approach recognizes the importance of linguistic diversity and advocates for the right of all individuals to communicate in their preferred language.

¹ American Bar Association, *Standards for Language Access in Courts*, February 2012, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_aid_indigent_defendants/lis_sclaid_standards_for_language_access_proposal.pdf.

Recommendations for Best Practices for Public Safety Funders and Community-based Organizations to Effectively Address Language Access Needs:

- ▶ **Budget for Language Services:** Include interpretation and translation costs in annual, strategic and project plans.
- ▶ **Research Local Needs:** Gather data on the most common languages in different geographical areas in your state to guide resource allocation.
- ▶ **Leverage Community Resources:** Contact local organizations, schools, places of worship or elected officials to identify languages spoken in the community.
- ▶ **Build Internal Language Resources:** Establish a team with linguistic expertise to advise on translation and interpretation needs.
- ▶ **Use Plain Language:** Ensure public documents are clear and understandable before translation.
- ▶ **Provide Multilingual Meeting Transcriptions:** If meetings are publicly recorded, consider providing transcriptions in multiple languages.
- ▶ Use qualified professionals for written translation and oral interpretation.
- ▶ Advertise the availability of language access services.
- ▶ Review U.S. Census data for current immigrant populations, and also consider predicted populations in your area. This can inform your efforts to prepare for necessary interpretations and translated documents.



CHAPTER 5:

Equity and Evaluation: Making Evaluation and Data Collection Accessible and Effective

NCJA and the committee would like to thank Dr. Constance Kostelac and her team at the Medical College of Wisconsin, Division of Data Analytics and Informatics in the Comprehensive Injury Center, for their contributions to this report and their continued efforts to understand and enhance equity in program evaluation

In program evaluation, it is critical to center all processes in equity. This involves ensuring that evaluation processes are fair and unbiased, with a focus on promoting equality and addressing disparities. One way to prioritize equity in program evaluation is by incorporating diverse perspectives and voices in the evaluation process. This can be achieved through inclusive data collection methods and engaging with stakeholders from various backgrounds.

Furthermore, making evaluation and data collection accessible and effective is vital for ensuring equitable outcomes. This involves using culturally sensitive data collection methods, providing language accessibility and considering the specific needs of different communities. By prioritizing equity in program evaluation, we can work towards creating more inclusive and impactful programs that benefit all individuals.

Why is Evaluation Important?

Evaluation helps document the progression and execution process and any alterations made during the program. It also assists in making informed decisions regarding the program, both in the short and long term. Additionally, evaluation helps in monitoring the program's advancement and recommending any necessary adjustments. Ultimately, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the program's inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. It is important to note that formal evaluation can be expensive, time-consuming and intimidating. It can be extremely impactful for a system partner to consider supporting evaluation through funding and/or partnership, and also to be open to embracing the value of other more informal evaluation efforts.

Evaluation as a Determinant of Funding:

The use of the terms evidence-based, best practice and promising practice are often used interchangeably and are regularly used as a determining factor for funding. This also means that these terms can be used in an excluding manner rather than an inclusive or supportive one. Depending on the purpose of funding and its requirement for evaluation, using language like evidence-informed allows for more flexibility and inclusivity. Funders play a crucial role in ensuring that agencies are guided to be more evidence-informed. Taking a chance with an agency when a new and innovative idea is presented is important before relying solely on past research.

“ It is crucial to recognize the potential consequences of evaluations and to strive for fairness, equity and social justice in the assessment process. ”

Evaluation Misuse

It is imperative to acknowledge the significant and complicated impact of evaluations, which have frequently been a contributing factor to causing harm or perpetuating existing injustice and inequality due to systemic biases in academia and otherwise. This acknowledgment underscores the critical need for conscientious consideration and the implementation of thoughtful, empathetic approaches to evaluations to prevent further perpetuation of these detrimental impacts on individuals and communities. It is crucial to recognize the potential consequences of evaluations and to strive for fairness, equity and social justice in the assessment process.

- ▶ Evaluation has been historically misused.
- ▶ Exclusionary processes have included relying on only certain types of “data” or “evidence” and narrow views of “success.”
- ▶ Evaluation often has not accounted for the context of the community, the values/beliefs of the program and the characteristics of program participants.
- ▶ Those who were closest to the community or trauma were excluded from the evaluation process, which continued the cycle of misevaluation.
- ▶ Rather than using evaluation to improve programs and identify where there are gaps, evaluation often came off as punitive and was treated as an “accountability tool.”
- ▶ Evaluations did not address disparities in opportunities and outcomes and sometimes even reinforced disparities.
- ▶ Power dynamics—evaluators often operated from positions of power.

Application of Equity²

Equity encompasses the concept of fairness and justice, which is attained by methodically identifying and addressing disparities through specific and targeted actions. Below are recommendations on applying equity to program evaluation.

To center equity, we must:

- ▶ Ground the work in data and context, and target solutions.
- ▶ Focus on systems change in addition to programs and services.
- ▶ Shift the balance of power within the collective.
- ▶ Listen to and act with the community.
- ▶ Drive evaluative work in service of equity.
- ▶ Embrace principles of equity through how information is produced, consumed and managed.
- ▶ Include a model of shared ownership between participants and evaluators.

Evaluative work can and should address critical questions about:

- ▶ How historical and structural decisions have contributed to the disparities in evaluation.
- ▶ The ways that strategies may affect populations differently and how evaluation can relate to the underlying systemic drivers of inequity.
- ▶ The ways in which cultural context is tangled up in both the structural conditions and the change initiative itself.

Traditional Approach to Evaluation vs. Evaluation with an Equity Lens³

Conventional Evaluations	Evaluations Centering Equity
Evaluation team does not examine team members' backgrounds, beliefs, and biases when conducting evaluation activities	Evaluation team uncovers assumptions, engages in reflexive practices, and acknowledges team members' beliefs
Evaluation considers program participants "subjects" of evaluation and limits their involvement in evaluation activities	Those affected by what is being evaluated have power to shape and own how evaluation happens
Evaluation does not identify possible contributing causal factors that enable issue to occur or persist	Theory of change and evaluation questions consider root causes of structural inequities that may influence likelihood of desired change
Evaluation presumes all data collection methods are suitable for all populations of interest	Selection of data collection methods includes considerations of which approaches best fit local and cultural contexts of population of interest and capture data on relevant contextual factors
Evaluation does not address that "whiteness" is the standard and does not consider validity issues when using measures with a different population	Variable measures produce scores with equivalent meanings across race and ethnicity, income, or language groups to avoid misrepresentation of observed relationships and causal relationships

² "EEF Expansion: Elements of the EEF—Principles," Equitable Evaluation Initiative, May 21, 2023, <https://www.equitableeval.org/post/eef-expansion-principles>.

³ Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) and Insight Policy Research, Inc., authored by Lila Gutuskey, *Centering Equity in Program Evaluation*, September 2022, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/centering_equity_program_evaluation_feb2023.pdf.

How to Embed Equity in Evaluation

- ▶ Recognize the diversity of the population or community you are working with.
- ▶ Be culturally responsive, as this is essential in progressing towards an equitable approach.
- ▶ Consider and value the cultural context of the community being served.
- ▶ Value the context being evaluated.
- ▶ Incorporate different sources of “ata” and “evidence.”
- ▶ Involve a variety of stakeholders, including those directly impacted by what is being evaluated.
- ▶ Provide a roadmap, but one that has built-in flexibility.
- ▶ Evaluators should reflect on their perspectives, beliefs and biases and how they influence the evaluation work.
- ▶ Be open to different metrics and see the perspectives and measurements of success from a community lens.
- ▶ Find ways to share power and decision-making.
- ▶ Focus on continuous learning and providing room for growth.
- ▶ See the relationship with system partners, funders and community-based organizations as a partnership with common goals to help remove the power imbalance.
- ▶ Remember every partner is different, meaning that best practices may vary by partner.
- ▶ Rely on both traditional and non-traditional data and approaches.
- ▶ The process of embedding equity within evaluation processes needs to be more than a checkbox for funding.
- ▶ Equitable evaluation is intended to be part of program implementation.
- ▶ Document the program, including evaluation efforts.

Brainstorming Behind the Scenes

The Board of Directors Equity Committee felt it was essential and transparent to show screenshots of the planning behind the scenes for this guidance document. Planning and brainstorming about each topic monthly were made fun and thought-provoking using Jamboard and corresponding dialogue. See below for screenshots corresponding to the guidance topics and subcategories:



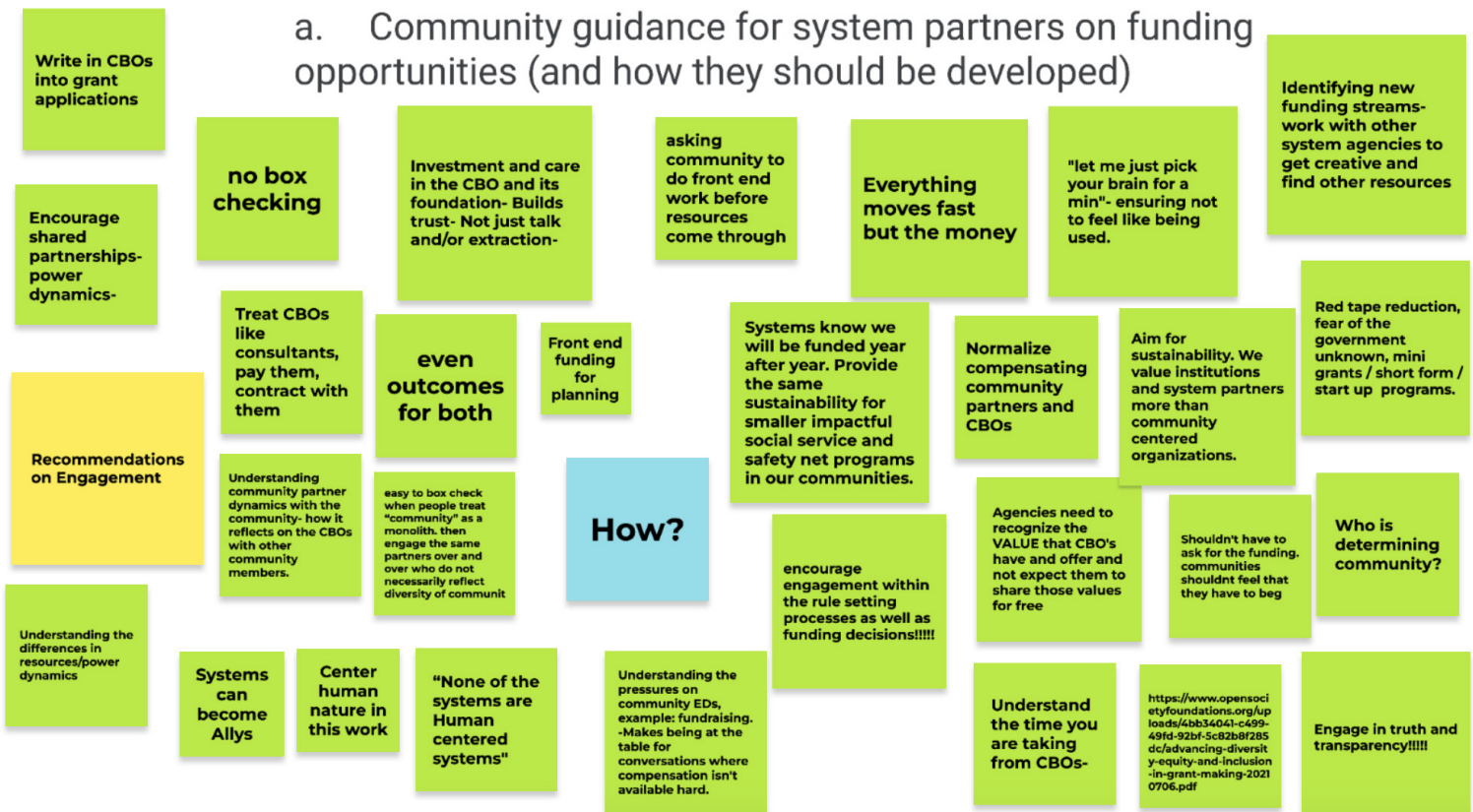
a. Community guidance for system partners on funding opportunities:
 What top processes/activities/decisions should the community be engaged on when it comes to funding and budgeting decisions?

timeline on outcome measures and understanding how long it might take to show success.

Governments role to initiate because government has done the most harm- Must be intentional in engagement for community as a PARTNER. as an US.

Recommendations on Engagement	RFP Process (All Aspects)	budgeting Process	Eligibility Criteria and Guidelines (Requires Flexibility)	Prioritizing new faces / looking at eligibility	pay for reviewers!! (appropriate pay for time it takes)	Community Meetings- Transparency and providing all of the information needed	Deeper than engagement- engagement with the actual intention to do something with it.
	What?	Subaward application review	Rating Criteria for scored applications	Committee stakeholders for determining final proposals- Engaging community also trains system folks	Board members for Final Sign Off after dollars are delivered	Strategic Planning (priority identification)	outcome measures!!!!!!! How to define success?
	New community engagement position	Ensuring reaching all languages.	Focus groups/town halls/open discussions	Tribal Communities	Ensure support systems for community engagement position so that all is not lost when person leaves position.	actively addressing power dynamics- culture shift.	Reporting requirements

a. Community guidance for system partners on funding opportunities (and how they should be developed)



When? Why should community partners engage with System Partners?

Beginning of grant development process

when funding committee is being formed

request public input during listening sessions

early and often

when the RFP hasn't been created yet

whenever you have questions -- make it a point to meet for clarification

grant debriefing and closeout

Before the RFP is created

Before final reports are due (before the end of the grant period ends)

summits and conferences

prior to funding

planning process

after funding is announced and awarded

ongoing communication is key

Today!

midpoint check in

state training and workshops

legislative budget process

coffee meetings to have a more informal atmosphere and set a less intimidating tone

system partner sponsored summits and events

community engagement events

quarterly

innovative approach

recurring basis

proactive

when new staff come on board

Legislative session

public meetings

directly after grant is awarded to inform them on the process and so feedback can be provided

when innovative approaches come up

RFP input, RFP release, and a mid-point check-in

Tips to community partners on engagement with system partners

when new staff come on board

Legislative session

What? Why should community partners engage with System Partners?

Working with me -- what are the advantages of engagement?

Don't be shy to reach out. The system partner is obligated to listen.

The community may use different measurements for success. Common ground in metrics. Traditional vs community metrics when measuring success.

There is value in community organizations having closer ties to the communities they serve.

Examples of what has been funded or worked

Ask system partners when their next "listening session" is, or when their next open meeting is for public comments.

How to make connections and value different models driven by community members, practitioners, and so on. Ex: Community-based participatory research.

There are different types of system partners, so utilize other folks to your advantage, such as elected officials who can advocate on CBO's behalf

Just because something hasn't been "evaluated" in a particular way, such as through an expensive academic study or RCT, doesn't mean it's not effective.

Community partners should insist they be engaged on boards and committees at the design stage, not merely at the review stage.

We all win when we are prepared (both the community orgs and their resources and the system partners)

Conversations need to take place with community partners regarding scarcity. Encouraging collaboration rather than competition.

Tips to community partners on engagement with System Partners

Qualitative data and sharing stories if possible

Being on record for projections and analyses from community partners regarding the future of trends. Ex: mass release.

Encouraging community partners to see their value and sharing reports with system partners to ensure gaps are closing in funding.

Don't set the community up for failure. Programs need a 360 evaluation Ex: release from prison without support (ID, meds, housing)...just back in the revolving door.

No more "that's not my problem thinking".

I would add conversations about exploring how to maximize resources via funding collaborative partnerships

The system partners and community organizations should interact in person more so gaps and success can be identified for tailored support.

A clear line of documentation/communication between system partners and community partners

Previous funding is credible -- showing what worked for other community organizations if you haven't been funded can help your case when applying.

Holding one another accountable!

Oaths that are taken with a humanity lens are taken but can change over time. These are misconstrued and many do not buy into it.

Stop thinking with a scarcity attitude.

Use Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Open Records laws to justify requests for documents (grant applications, grant reports, etc.)

Over-prioritization of "proven" models also stifles much-needed innovation.

Having an example of an open grant process for community partners so they can know the system. Open transparency for models of success.

Collaborating with an open mindset rather than believing common myths. Breaking those embedded socialization myths. Build it up by breaking those beliefs

Having a liaison to bridge the gap

Not believing that those who seek the expertise of those with lived experiences are sent to exploit. Speak up when you feel you may be taken advantage of.



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