Center for Community Resilience

# Fostering Equity:
## Creating Shared Understanding for Building Community Resilience

## Module III

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# Module III

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# Community Engagement Strategies

"**N**othing about us, without us!"** is a slogan used to communicate the idea that policy should not be created or implemented without full and direct participation of the people who will be affected. This is an important reminder that *the path to equity runs straight through community*. As such, Module III will focus on authentically engaging communities and stakeholders in the conversation. These strategies were compiled from the shared experiences of the Building Community Resilience collaborative over the past five years and are based on lessons learned from our work together.

## Keys to Authentic Engagement

### The Way We Show Up

Communities, however defined, are made up of people who bring a range of experiences and histories. Remaining open and curious is essential to understanding a community's values, strengths and wisdom.

### Unpacking Bias to Address Equity

Within social groups, there is a segment whose dominance was unjustly established through the creation of narratives that assigned priority to the needs and concerns of one group over others. It follows that this group's interests heavily influenced the development and implementation of policies that codified their accepted narratives into the nation's systems and institutions.[1] For example, white people are the dominant social race in America, men are the dominant social gender, and wealthy people are the dominant social class. Dominant social groups tend to aggregate power and accrue the greatest benefit over time from privilege.

## Defining Power and Privilege

The National Conference for Community and Justice uses the following definitions[2] to help explain power and privilege:

**Privilege**: Unearned access to resources (i.e., power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.

**Power**: Access to resources that enhance your chances of getting what you need in order to lead a comfortable, productive, and safe life.

Each social identity uniquely affects whether and how a person holds privilege and power, thereby influencing how they exist in, engage with, and are treated by the world. This affects the way you are received, and the way you show up and receive others. Assessing your social identity, and the potential bias that comes with it, allows you to acknowledge that everyone doesn't exist in the world the same way. Recognizing that we are subject to the effects of wearing 'blinders' enables us to step outside of our perceived reality and create space for conversations that take in other perspectives on the experience of inequity.

For more information on implicit bias, check out the resources available at the Racial Equity Tools web site:

https://www.racialequitytools.org/act/communicating/implicit-bias

## The Way We Show Up:

### An Example from BCR Network Partners in Oregon

*Pari Mazhar, Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion / Immigrant & Refugee services, Cascadia Behavioral Health Services*

Cascadia's overall goals are to reduce health and racial disparities; improve services to communities of color and marginalized population, improve culturally specific services, and increase the inclusivity of our environment for staff, clients, and our communities at large. Building on consistent training on Biases and Micro aggression across the agency and disciplines, the organization will have a new overarching Equity Plan and program-specific equity sub-plans by June 2020.

To continue to inform these efforts, Cascadia regularly hosts community conversations, workshops and trainings on equity and wellbeing (**https://cascadiabhc.org/community-events/**), as well as a regular information series highlighting the experiences of immigrants and refugees (**https://who-we-are.wixsite.com/2019**).

## Honoring Wisdom of Community:
## A Key Strategy in Building Trust

It is critical to elevate the lived experience of children and families closest to trauma by listening to their stories and learning their experiences and views. This will take time. But the reward will be a greater understanding of the real-life consequences of policies and practices enacted by systems and institutions that drive many of the disparities and inequities we see today. The path to equitable, resilient communities for all will be supported by policy reforms, novel partnerships, and innovative solutions rooted in community wisdom.

### What does it mean to honor the wisdom of community?

It means acknowledging that you don't know what you don't know but you remain curious in the process of discovery. Our nation's history is rife with examples of laws, policies and practices that set a foundation of inequity. This history – and the consequences and disparities that result today, locally and nationally – have often gone unseen despite being in plain sight as described in Module I. The inability to acknowledge the effects of trauma due to inequity is a form of privilege that can be painful and retraumatizing to those who live with inequity everyday.

'Honoring the wisdom of community' means knowing and showing that these experiences and the knowledge derived from them are extremely valuable – and ensuring your actions and follow-up are consistent with your commitment.

## Checking Your Approach: Engagement vs. Exploitation

Thoughtful consideration of how we engage potential partners—whether they are community members, professional stakeholders or government entities – is critical to establishing and maintaining lasting relationships. Too often, organizations go into a community seeking data or to implement a program without asking what community members would like in return for their time and investment. This approach can amount to exploitation; taking advantage for one's own benefit without providing reciprocal value. A more productive, respectful path begins with the expectation that you will give, not just gain.

**Ask: What can I do for you?** Lasting relationships and equitable partnerships with community are based in mutual benefit. Be prepared to work through a process to identify how the community values their time and determine what you can provide.

Do they want information, such as data that you're uniquely positioned to provide? Do you have expertise or guidance they want shared with others in their community or professional group? If you're doing research and the community is providing data through interviews or other means, how would they like to receive updates and a final report when your study is complete? How will you compensate community members for their time and wisdom? Is compensation provided that is commensurate with the value of their time and effort? Do you provide food and drink or childcare during your meeting? Monetary compensation or gift cards?

**Intentions & Presumptions.** Our intentions based on a desire to 'do good' can distort what we see, hear and experience in community—leading to false presumptions of what's best for community. We've learned it is best to set aside these presumptions and instead engage with community members to learn how best to proceed. Attempting to listen to community – or any potential partner – with presumptions in the forefront of our thinking blocks an opportunity to learn through natural curiosity, openness and authenticity. The latter qualities encourage us to work collaboratively toward healing and solutions.

**Beware the 'Gatekeeper.'** One person cannot be the voice for a community. To prevent being hindered by the limitations of a 'gatekeeper', spend time developing multiple relationships within organizations and across community. With this approach, power is spread among a range of voices, and a more reliable, diverse and representative picture can come into focus.

**Respect the Limitations of Data.** Policymakers and local leaders who will be key partners in this work often require data to help describe an issue. Data are a form of currency that are used by lawmakers to support policy and shape budgets. While data can tell a story, it is not the entire story. You can paint a picture of inequity using numbers, but it is the stories behind those numbers that make them meaningful.

# The Way We Show Up: Building Trust and Relationships With Community

**Vontriece McDowell**

Director of Community-Based Interventions

Alive & Well Communities (awcommunities.org)

St. Louis, MO

"I've learned over the years and by making many mistakes, that the way I enter a community directly impacts my effectiveness as well as the level of engagement from members of the community.  In order to build genuine relationships that don't feel transactional, we must check our assumptions and be willing to look internally. In learning this, I have been able to build relationships that will last even when the time comes to move on.

**Be your true, authentic self.** The people will know when you are not.

**Don't buy into dominant narratives.** When our engagement efforts are unsuccessful, we sometimes create narratives that perpetuate the stereotypes and stories being told about marginalized communities. We tell ourselves that people in these communities don't care, that they are complacent, or that this is the norm.

**Step back and evaluate.** Is your heart in the work you're doing? Do you care about the community you're trying to work with? Do you believe in the community and its people? Did you think it would be easy because you look like the people?  Did you count yourself out because you don't?

**Realize the real expertise is in community.** Effective community engagement requires us to enter a community with humility. We are not the experts in what has and is happening in the community. We are there to learn and to work with, not for.

**Don't let your differences become a barrier.** When you are committed and folks see that you truly care, your differences will no longer be as visible.  When you show up outside of work hours, when you are there when the fires are burning, when you deliver your best no matter the stories you've heard, when you don't run at the first, second, or third sign of conflict…you begin to build real, authentic, trusting relationships."

# Tools: Planning Respectful, Effective Engagement

Reflect on the following questions as you plan to engage community and other stakeholders in seeking partnerships. Consider the examples and the differences in approaches in the chart below.

- *What would the community gain from your engagement or proposal ('What's in it for me?')?*
- *Do you have existing trust and relationships with community members?*
- *Does your approach serve to build trust?*
- *Could it come across as an attempt to 'take' something from the community (information, time)?*
- *Does the approach help you to learn from community?*
- *Could it be interpreted as you trying to 'tell' the community something about how they should do something differently in a manner that does not respect their autonomy or lived experience?*

| Absence of Community Wisdom | Engaging with Community Wisdom | Context |
|---|---|---|
| We have anti-violence programming that could really help your community.<br><br>It's been tested in other cities and has shown success – especially in places where gangs have been a problem.<br><br>Can you help us think through the best way to set up this programming here? | We are part of a collaborative interested in partnerships to help address community violence.<br><br>We understand this is an issue that's really impacting your community day-to-day.<br><br>Would you be willing to start a conversation so we can begin to learn from you?<br><br>We would like to understand how you and your neighbors are affected, learn about some of the grassroots work we know is currently going on, and hear more about the ideas and develop prevention and healing solutions with community input. | When we disregard community wisdom, our approach is prescriptive and paternalistic. It implies that we – outsiders – know what's best for the community (i.e., our anti-violence programming), assumes that what works in one place will also work in another (i.e. "tested in other cities"), and asks the community to act without securing buy-in (i.e., help us set our program up). As a result, we invalidate and eliminate community-developed solutions as options before we even begin engaging. But when we enter with humility expressed in a desire to partner with community, our approach is reflective and allows for co-design with the individuals |

| Absence of Community Wisdom | Engaging with Community Wisdom | Context |
|---|---|---|
| | | we seek to impact. Instead of assuming we are welcome and telling the community what we can do, we ask if they are interested in our help, listen to their experience to identify pressing issues, and co-create solutions. |

## Tough Conversations

The push toward equity can be an emotional journey. In the United States, the subject of equity carries with it painful and thorny topics such as racism, oppression, white supremacy and consideration of our personal relationships to each.

### Creating Safe Space, Growing Through Discomfort

These topics are heavy, yet a safe environment can be created in which challenging topics can be put forth, productive conversation take place, the range of human emotions present themselves and are respected without derailing the work. Creating a safe space can promote progress.

Navigating our own conversations on equity, racism, implicit bias and power provided a pivotal moment of growth and learning for the national BCR collaborative. During our Fall 2018 national meeting in Dallas, TX, following a long day of conversation on these topics, participants were in need of quiet reflection time to process emotions that were stirred and the nuanced topics raised. The BCR national team learned firsthand the danger in not allowing participants the space and time to process their conversations individually and collectively. Once this was named, the collaborative chose to go off script and devote the rest of the day to "calling each other in" to reflect upon conversations that made some question the biases of others and themselves and process the pain felt on either side. We have learned that moments of 'turbulence' are inevitable in the course of sharing our lived experience of inequity, trauma, racism and power. How we hold space—create safety—for all participants is both an exercise in building trust and confidence in each other.

It is critical to note that 'safety' should not be taken as feeling 'comfortable' or at ease. Trust and respect, however, are fundamental. In the BCR collaborative, transformative growth and learning has come out of feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

We've done so by 'holding space' -- respecting and keeping members at the table, in a way that facilitates deeper understanding. Achieving this takes time, trust and dedication to our collective mission.

## The "Cost" of Equity

Advancing equity requires change. That change can take many forms, such as a shift in ideology, a balancing of power dynamics, or a greater commitment of resources that support equitable conditions. The very topic of change can trigger feelings of vulnerability or concerns that something will be taken away. This could be resources, time, attention or anticipation that one's perceived status or leverage will be removed. Change can also trigger feelings of vulnerability or fear that new responsibilities will be expected – these are emotions a person may not feel prepared to manage in a public space. Ultimately, the drive toward equity is not just about change, but growth – personal, organizational, and systemic.

## Staying at the Table

Throughout this work, there may be moments where coalition partners or community members want to walk away from the table (physically or metaphorically), due to frustrations with the pace of progress, discomfort in discussing the effects of racism, struggles to find common ground, or feeling tired of explaining why equity matters. All of these feelings are valid, but they don't have to derail the work. In fact, these situations are where clarity, fueled "aha" moments, lead to fundamental change. For these reasons, it's incredibly important to find ways to work through the turbulence and stay engaged in the dialogue.

# Exploring Power Dynamics

Everyone holds some form of power – such as moral, charismatic, or expert power – which usually translates into some form of agency or control. Power can be rightfully earned, but we know some is bestowed unfairly – by systems, status quo, and the mechanisms discussed in earlier sections of this tool. In our work to build more equitable, resilient communities for all, Building Community Resilience collaboratives explore what it would look and feel like to share, confer and reorganize power.

# Types of Power

**Traditional / organizational power** – the type of power a manager, executive, or another official has due to status or position

**Information power** – knowing something other people want to know; could be anything from intricate knowledge about a person, company or policy to gossip

**Expert power** – having more knowledge or experience than other members of the team

**Referent power** – who you know; social and professional connections that can be used to your advantage. The effectiveness of these connections may reflect your proximity to someone or organizations with traditional power.

**Reward power** – ability to reward an employee or team member (with money, praise, etc.)

**Charismatic power** – power to influence through a natural ability to persuade or inspire others

**Coercive power** – having the ability to punish an employee or team member; the threat of punishment can persuade people to act a certain way

**Moral power** – "Halo effect" that results from ethical leadership and respect for demonstrated beliefs and actions; inspires people to replicate the leader's actions.

*Source: Adapted from French & Raven's (1959) Bases of Power (https://yscouts.com/executive/types-of-leadership-power/)*

## Exercise: Power Analysis

Review the types of power listed in the chart above. With your organization in mind, consider the following questions.

1. Who has power and what kind?

   _____

2. What are the benefits of power? How is power wielded?

   _____

3. Are there people with little or no power? If so, what are the results of this power imbalance?

   _____

4. Do you see power imbalances? If so, would adjusting some of those imbalances have a benefit?

   _____

   _____

5. How would it feel to share or confer your power? To be given additional power?

   _____

   _____

6. What might it look like to shuffle power to make your work more equitable? Consider:
   a.    Decision making processes
   b.    Hiring practices
   c.    Resource distribution
   d.    Program implementation
   e.    Marketing / outreach efforts or materials
   f.    Leadership or board makeup
   g.    Agenda setting

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

## Exploring Power:

### An Example from BCR Network Partner Alive and Well Communities

*Jennifer Brinkmann, President, Alive and Well Communities*

Alive and Well Communities was established in 2018 as an independent organization after two separate initiatives to create trauma-informed communities in St. Louis and Kansas City merged. Creating a new organization presented an opportunity to revisit conventional wisdom about how nonprofits are governed. The founders were intentional in centering community wisdom in the guidance and ownership of the work and ensuring the work explicitly advanced equity with a focus on racial equity.

The science of trauma points to the long-term, intergenerational harm that racism and other forms of oppression create. Today, Alive and Well Communities works both in community and with institutions to disrupt systems of oppression that perpetuate trauma, supporting individuals and institutions as they adopt a "trauma lens" to advocate for practice and policy changes that lead to healing, well-being and equity. This work happens by building a common understanding of the science and the impact of trauma on individual health and population-level health outcomes. In community settings, residents use this knowledge to identify how they can organize to disrupt the trauma impacting them the most. In institutions, individuals work to apply the principles of trauma-informed care in a way that leads to equity. For example, organizations work to create physical and emotional safety, recognizing the impact of historic power differentials and how bias shows up in the organizational cultures.

For more information, visit **https://www.awcommunities.org/our-mission**.

## Equity in Action: Wielding Your Power for Good

<u>Pass the mic.</u> If you hold power or privilege, use your standing as someone whose opinion and voice is valued by passing the microphone. Instead of speaking once again, confer some of your power onto a person whose voice is rarely heard or who has a valuable but under-recognized perspective.

<u>Listen, lift up, and give credit publicly.</u> When a good idea is shared by someone who does not typically get recognized, sometimes the idea can get co-opted by, or credited to someone who has privilege or greater power or presence. When this happens, publicly recognize the idea and give credit to the person who said it.

**Do the opposite.** Depending on the setting or the company you are in, you may feel very comfortable (or uncomfortable) sharing your opinions and speaking up. Consider stepping out of your comfort zone and try the opposite approach. If you usually talk a lot, focus on listening more – or using your voice to pass the mic or lift up another person's perspective. If you typically stay quiet, try sharing your thinking or suggestions.

## Calling In vs. Calling Out

Calling someone out or singling out a person for a comment or action can result in public shaming. Shaming and singling out individuals can be harmful to your relationship with individuals and those you seek to influence. More often than not, the person who is singled out may internalize that shame, shut down, and withdraw from the situation – or the work – completely. In short, instead of bringing them into the work calling out individuals has the effect of pushing them out of the conversation. **Instead, try calling them in.** When you call someone in, you can directly address problematic behavior or comments, hold accountability in a way that conveys compassion, understanding, patience, and openness to growth. It may feel unfair to have to consider the perspective and feelings of someone who has said or done something problematic, but by doing so you leave the door open for future positive engagement, which is a critical piece to building community resilience.

We cannot offer a hard-and-fast rule for when to call someone in versus calling them out, but we can offer some recommendations:

- *Make your decision from a place of curiosity, patience, and compassion. Remember that all of us have said or done something problematic before in our lives.*
- *Consider what you know about the person's track record – Is this their first offense? Do they have a history of problematic behavior or comments? Have they been warned about it before?*

If necessary, give yourself a little time and distance from the incident before opening the conversation.

# Q&A:
# How Collaboratives can Manage Through Turbulence

*Leaders in the Building Community Resilience collaborative, Calvin Smith, Chair of the Ward 8 Health Council in Washington, DC and Jennifer Brinkmann, President of Alive and Well Communities in St. Louis, MO, share key takeaways from their years of equity work.*

**Addressing equity and historical or present-day traumas is heavy work – especially in a diverse group of individuals from different backgrounds. If tension arises in a collaborative, how can we keep moving forward together?**



**Jennifer:** Folks in positions of power can make mistakes in this work. If we want to feel comfortable all the time, we will not move forward. We need to name things that are harmful, make space, and honor each person's perspective in a meaningful way.



**Calvin:** Everybody is not going to be politically correct. When it pops up, it needs to be addressed in a non-threatening way and the person who made the statement is corrected. Or, sometimes it's not what you say, it's how you say it – if that can be diffused, you can go on. But if the reaction is confrontational, you can't go on.

**Breaking into groups organized by identity (race, gender, etc.) for discussion is sometimes called identity-based caucusing. What's the benefit of talking about an issue with just the people you share an identity with?**

**Calvin:** If I'm with people who I self-identify with, the conversation is freer and much more open. [There is] a common denominator. You can get a deeper understanding.  Identity Based Caucusing is a tool that should be strategically utilized and agreed upon by all participants and used as a basis for clarity.

**Jennifer:** I agree. It just shows up differently, perhaps, for white folks who can be worried in a broader group about saying the wrong thing, or that their ignorance will unintentionally harm or hurt. [It's a way to] learn how to do better.

**You've said this is a tool for the internal work that is necessary when working on equity externally, among a diverse group.**

**Calvin:** Identity-based caucusing is a tool that will allow self- identified groups an opportunity to 'know yourself first,' before you can integrate with others.

**Jennifer:** It represents the need for each of us to do our own work. To ask, 'how do we advance the work without dominating and potentially creating more harm?' It also is a tool for white people to understand "whiteness" and how our identities can stand in the way of equity.

You both caution that such caucusing is a more advanced tool to be used thoughtfully and when a culture of trust, transparency, and commitment to equity work is already established. If not, breaking out by identity when tension arises in a group can sometimes backfire.

**Calvin:** Caucusing is an arrow in your quiver that you can use to tamp things down if it rises to that level. I appreciate it, know how to do it. But if you aren't in an environment where everyone is on the same page, it may be more harmful than good.

**Jennifer:** You have to read the room. If people [feel] frozen – not sure how to move through the moment – sometimes groups need to process in their own identity groups. Race caucusing is a very carefully thought out, managed process.

**Calvin:** [Tension] can happen at any time - someone can say something that they've not thought through. The key is, does it rise to level of race caucusing? Or is it an opportunity to [call them 'in'], let the person pause and reflect on sensitivities they hurt?

Links to resources on identity caucusing:

https://www.racialequitytools.org/act/strategies/caucus-affinity-groups

https://www.compasspoint.org/blog/race-caucusing-organizational-context-poc's-experience

## Equity: The Path from Trauma to Resilience

In this work to build a nation of resilient communities – where children and families not only bounce back in the face of adversity but thrive – we must broaden our lens to understand the roles that trauma and equity play.

The Pair of ACEs tree is planted in soil depleted of nutrients, which is experienced collectively as community trauma. Attempting to manage through daily assaults including lack of access -- to economic mobility, quality schools, safe neighborhoods -- while also facing community disruption or racism, for example, has devastating effects on individual and community health and wellbeing. Decades of data show us consistently stark disparities in outcomes between those facing such trauma compared to those with protective community supports and buffers in place.

Healing the historical and present-day traumas driving today's disparities must be grounded in equity, a process that seeks to under-stand and address the needs of communities treated as 'less than,' and make them whole. Only through equity – correcting the failings of systems, policies and practices that maintain a status quo of trauma and poor outcomes in certain communities – can we build and sustain community resilience for all.
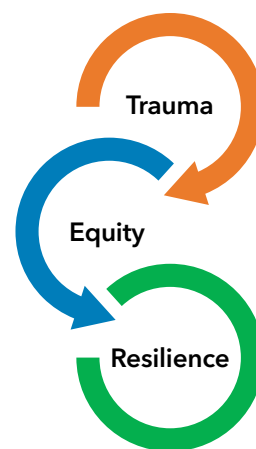
# Endnotes

1    Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L.M., & Malle, B.F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*(4), 741-763. Retrieved from https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3207711/Sidanius_SocialDominanceOrientation.pdf?sequence=1.

2    National Conference for Community and Justice. (n.d.). What is privilege? Retrieved from https://www.nccj.org/what-privilege.

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