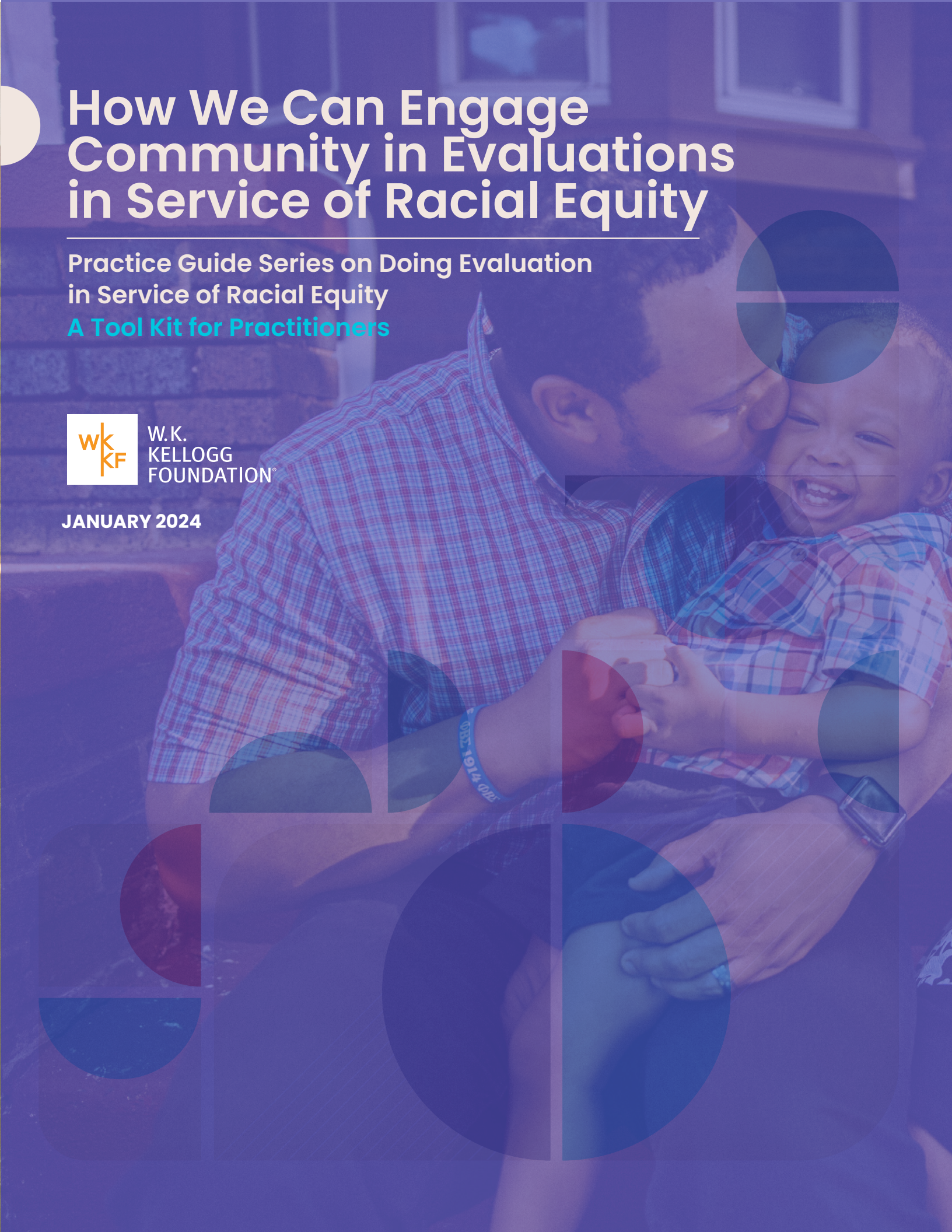
How We Can Engage Community in Evaluations in Service of Racial Equity

Practice Guide Series on Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

A Tool Kit for Practitioners



W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION®

JANUARY 2024

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Introduction

It has been almost two years since the Practice Guides on Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity were published. Since then, evaluators continue their commitment to advance racial equity through their practice as evident in the number of pre-conference workshops at the 2022 American Evaluation Association conference (almost one-third of total workshops), activities and publications by the Equitable Evaluation Initiative, and the growing network of culturally responsible equitable evaluation practitioners.

Since the practice guides' release, Community Science, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, conducted many workshops and webinars about the information in the guides. Questions were collected as part of the registration and during the events. The questions shed light on the challenges we still face in supporting and doing evaluation in service of equity. In general, people are still working to get concrete about *how* to implement such evaluations and overcome the resistance — intentional or not — to engaging in courageous conversations about racial equity and shifting current practices in evaluation, community engagement, strategy development, and grantmaking.

The questions reaffirm that evaluators alone cannot advance the practice of doing evaluation in service of racial equity. The guides discuss the importance of recognizing this point. The larger systemic issues at play contribute to racial inequity, and social injustice requires all of us in philanthropy, government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors to work differently.

Community Science compiled common questions from evaluators, funders, executive directors, and program staff, organized them into themes, and attempted to answer them in this tool kit. Some questions cannot be answered easily because the solutions aren't the evaluation profession and evaluators' responsibility alone. For instance, questions about the distribution of wealth, role of philanthropy in closing the wealth gap, levers of change to prioritize public and philanthropic investments in communities of color, ways to manage and disrupt power differences between foundations and organizations that receive funding, use of power and narratives to center equity and justice in philanthropy, and building leadership that isn't resistant to racial equity. There were also questions about shifting power, engaging communities, creating space in federal agencies for discussions about community engagement and racial equity, and changing mindsets and behaviors of leadership.

In addition, there were questions we can only answer through a broader dialogue with social scientists from different disciplines with various philosophical approaches to research and evaluation (e.g., is community-based participatory research equitable, how to stop relying on pre- and post-outcome data).

This tool kit isn't intended to repeat the original practice guides. It compiles new information in slide decks, tip sheets, and blogs. Some of the blogs have been written by Daniela Pineda and her colleagues at RTI International in support of the ***Practice Guides***. This tool kit also doesn't contain all the answers. We invite you to take the guidance farther and share your experiences. This tool kit, in our humble opinion, is merely another way to approach evaluation in service of racial equity and a starting place for people interested in this work.



Frequently Asked Questions About Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

People who attended Community Science's workshops and webinars about *Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity* raised questions about how evaluators can reflect on their own mental models, biases, and preferred evaluation practices and how these could affect the way they design and implement evaluations, and how evaluators can engage community and work toward equity across all aspects of evaluation design. Here, we address the questions that repeatedly arose. The tip sheets, slide decks, and blogs in the tool kit that accompany the *Practice Guide Series on Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity* offer additional information to answer these questions.

We know, as evaluators, that funders want us to examine the data and highlight their desired successes. How do we deal with this, which can create bias in our design and findings?

Be clear about your "why" — why you are doing evaluation and why evaluation is critical for informing progress toward racial equity. Being grounded in your purpose can help you maintain your integrity and adhere to the principles of good evaluation. You might want to engage the funder in a dialogue about why they only want to highlight the successes, what they can learn from what didn't work, and how their decisions will be affected by focusing only on the wins. At best, you could suggest an internal memo to highlight the shortcomings in addition to the external-facing report to highlight the successes.

As an evaluator, how can I manage clients' expectations about my ability to practice evaluation in service of racial equity?

The most important thing is to be honest about your ability. Equally important is managing clients' expectations about what an evaluation in service of racial equity is and the conditions necessary to practice it.

How do we incorporate racial equity into our practice when that isn't what our clients are focusing on, and they don't want to discuss it?

Understand the resistance. Also, perhaps not everyone in the organization is unwilling to discuss racial equity. See the **Tip Sheet on Ways to Overcome Resistance to the Idea and Practice of Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity** in this tool kit.

How can we use a systems lens and still be realistic about the outcomes?

We know that sustainable systems change takes time. Foundations often want systems change, but the grant period and amount aren't usually sufficient to bring about the change envisioned. Evaluators can help foundations "work backwards" to determine feasible and realistic outcomes with useful tools like the theory of change and logic model. Keep in mind that capacity building of grantees and community partners will likely be necessary along the way to collect and use the data needed to improve their strategy and activities — and meet the funder's reporting expectations. See the **Slide Deck on A Racial Equity Lens** from the Get-go in this tool kit. Another useful resource is "Local Empowerment Through Rapid Results" by Nadim Matta and Peter Morgan, published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2011, which describes activities and immediate, short-term outcomes that can be expected in efforts to achieve sustainable social change and scale.

Evaluation that furthers racial equity must be asset-based and committed to collective improvement yet much of this sector is deficit-focused. People disaggregate outcomes by race and describe that as an effort to advance equity. Evaluation products may further inequality by emphasizing the difference between groups without sufficient context. Evaluation also tends to not highlight bright spots and explain what's working in institutions or among subgroups achieving high outcomes. What can we do about this?

Decisionmakers must shift their mindset from deficit- to asset-based, though we have the responsibility of pointing out the deficit-focus. Our implicit biases about communities of color and others that have been historically excluded normalize their deficits. We can ensure that evaluation and learning questions aren't solely focused on the problem and improving the capacities of organizations and communities, but on strengths and what is already working. Evaluators can also emphasize in findings and recommendations the norms, behaviors, relationships, and other conditions that facilitate a community's ability to progress toward its desired outcomes.

How can evaluators balance expectations for rigor (in the traditional, positivist sense) with the imperative to elevate context and other ways of knowing?

Rigor is about being principled, methodical, transparent, and honest. Context and other ways of knowing are not vague or superfluous variables. On the contrary, their critical variables in evaluations to explain what happened, so long as information about them is collected and analyzed systematically.

What evaluation tools are the most critical to master to serve movements for equity?

Evaluation can be most useful to movements for equity by collaborating with movement leaders to 1) identify what they need to know to strengthen and support the movement; 2) review the outcomes and measures to make sure they're supportive of the movement and equity; and 3) determine how the findings should be reported and communicated for use by leaders. The most important way to serve movements for equity is to ensure the planning process for the entire evaluation (i.e., theory of change development, stakeholder engagement, data collection, analyses, interpretation, reporting, and use of findings to strengthen the movement) is conducted in collaboration with movement leaders.

How do we balance institutionalized scientific values with communities' perspectives when designing our interventions and evaluations?

Community members know what's happening in their lives and community and what change looks like. Without their participation and knowledge, it's easy to develop measures of progress that are irrelevant and consequently, inaccurate, rendering the evaluation invalid and not helpful. There is increasing acceptance that community engagement is crucial in evaluation, not only those in service of racial equity, but it will take more than just evaluators to advocate for the importance to equal any other methodological matter. See the section on community engagement for more detailed information and tips.



We want to include community voice in the evaluation process, however sometimes we have short time frames and small budgets that make it challenging.

Community engagement should be treated as important as any other methodological issue, such as construct development and validity. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case. As such, evaluators can attempt to negotiate a higher budget and longer time frame or decide for themselves how important community engagement is to the quality of their evaluation. They'll have to weigh possible trade-offs that can still yield a good evaluation in service of racial equity. Areas of potential trade-off could be shorter and fewer reports in order to increase the compensation for community members' time or fewer interviews to allow for more time in the beginning of the evaluation to build relationships. A smaller number of interviews may be acceptable because of data saturation in qualitative research. Evaluators can follow up with more interviews if an issue needs further exploration. See also the **Tip Sheet for How to Respond to Scenarios about Engaging Community in Evaluation** in this tool kit.

How can we build trust with communities which do not trust evaluation for reasons such as 1) being treated inequitably for so long, 2) the close relationship of evaluators with funders, and 3) evaluations being tied to funding decisions?

This is a challenge that cannot be quickly or easily overcome due to deep institutional practices that have contributed to the mistrust. We can start by being honest, transparent, and direct about our evaluator role and the extent of our influence on the funder and grantmaking process. We can also consider what we can "give back" to the community that is within our role and not overpromise. The reality is that evaluators who practice evaluation in service of racial equity will have to go a little beyond their scope of work to appreciate community voice and ensure fairness in their practice.

How do we shift power dynamics (e.g., between funders, communities and evaluators)?

The power dynamic can only shift so much because funders have the monies communities want to be able to address challenges, improve community conditions, and effect systems change. Nevertheless, here are some ways to disrupt the status quo. Funders must 1) be transparent and direct about their expectations about outcomes from the start and not change them in the middle of the initiative; 2) work with the communities they support to think through what sustainability looks like from the start and not six months before the end of the initiative; 3) be clear about what they can and cannot do at the policy level to advocate for the issues of concern to the communities; and 4) acknowledge the power they have and what aspects of that they are willing and not willing to give up.

How can we help facilitate a shared understanding and analysis of community in our organizations? For example, in philanthropy, "community" is simply groups of grantees or other nonprofits; however, some movement leaders have been explicit that communities include government entities, bodegas, etc. When funders find out "community" is not synonymous with grantees, it can create tension between funders and grantees as the former focus on elevating "community."

Be explicit with funders from the start about what "community" means and refers to. This discussion is covered in the practice guide, Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement. One of the resources included in this tool kit, a Slide Deck on Community Engagement in Evaluations in Service of Racial Equity: What, When, and How, addresses this question.

How do we reach the "community" when we are working with grantees who aren't necessarily part of the community that we want to elevate? How do we address tensions that might arise with grantees in this process?



Query the funder and the grantees' assumptions about how they view and understand the "community" they intend to serve, support, and collaborate with. As the evaluator, team up with a partner steeped in facilitating difficult conversations, because deeply entrenched beliefs, norms, and behaviors will likely have to be made explicit, discussed, and perhaps shifted. Power differences must also be discussed. This isn't something that can be addressed quickly or easily through a single event or meeting, but a strategy and process that need to be designed thoughtfully and put in place for a period of time.

How do we determine what is fair compensation for community involvement?

Ask a handful of people who work with the community, community leaders, and community members about what type of compensation is considered fair and relevant for their time. There might be trade-offs to consider about the design if the budget is not sufficient to cover the compensation. See also the **Tip Sheet for How to Respond to Scenarios about Engaging Community in Evaluation** and the Blog on Getting Out of Our Own Way: Navigating Organizational Barriers to Engage Communities in Research in this tool kit.

How can we create inclusive spaces of learning where both grantees and communities can wield their own power to co-design inquiry frameworks?

This is not the evaluator's responsibility alone, especially if there's an intermediary or technical assistance partner involved. Nevertheless, here are some ideas. Frequently, the learning agenda is developed by the funder, technical assistance partner, or evaluator based on "lessons learned" data from grantees. This approach means that grantees may have struggled for one year to overcome a challenge and the topic finally got on the agenda after the evaluator completed data analysis and summarized the "lessons learned." If the learning agenda is to be co-created, funders, technical assistance providers, and evaluators should intentionally ask grantees and communities from the start what they need to be successful and effective in their work. The grantees' answers become the basis for the agenda. Peer sharing and technical assistance should also be added. Finally, a "learning committee" that includes grantees and community members could be established early on to guide the agenda and creation of inclusive learning spaces.

What questions can we ask grantees to understand the extent of their community engagement?

Questions could include:

- How does your project or program include or incorporate the norms, values, and beliefs of the people and communities you serve?
- How does the context (e.g., history, geographic location, size of community) shape and affect your approach and outcomes?
- What role do the people who lead and are trusted by the communities you serve have in your project or program?

Community Engagement in Evaluations in Service of Racial Equity: What, When, and How

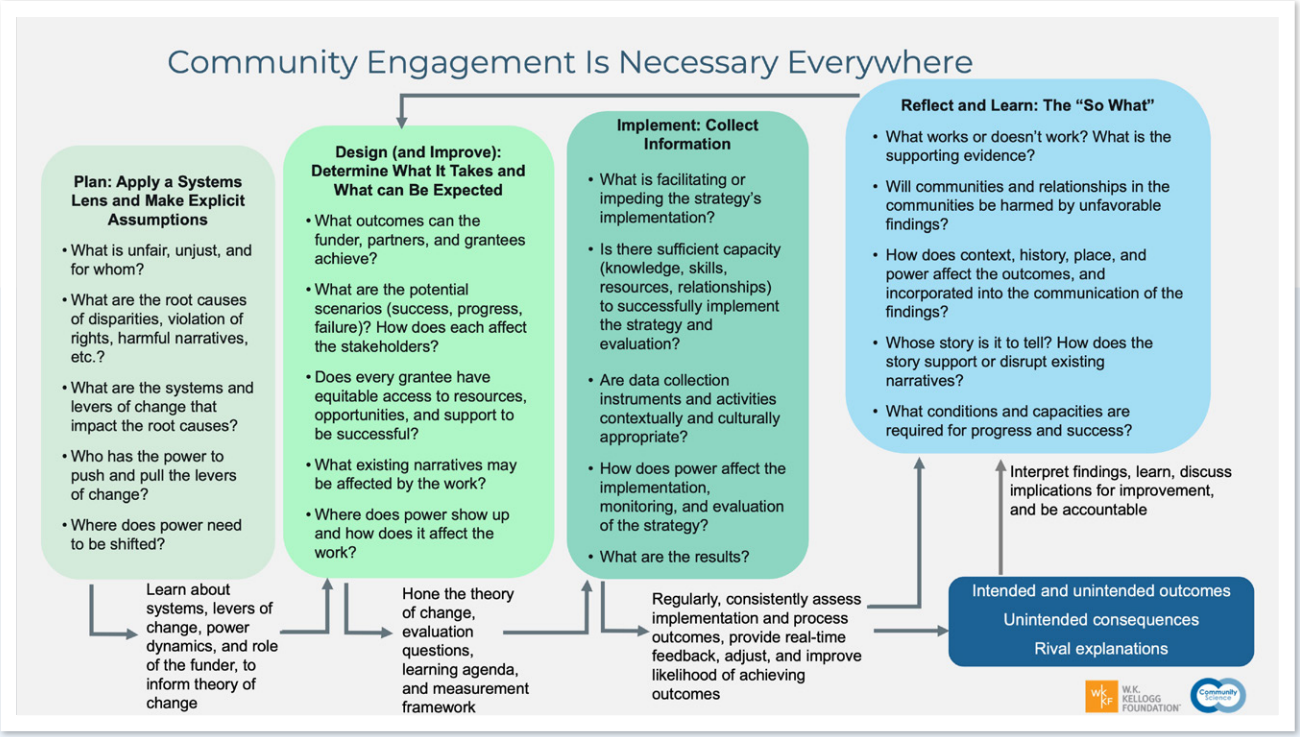
September 2022

Community engagement is a loaded word. It could mean anything from gathering input from community organizations or community residents to deferring to community leadership in decisionmaking. The questions frequently asked by evaluation officers in foundations are:

- How should we engage community when we don't frequently have the chance to work directly with community members and our program colleagues are the ones with the relationships?
- How do we determine the relationships we need to develop?
- How much community engagement is sufficient?
- Are the relationships we develop supposed to be ongoing, in perpetuity?

This slide deck begins to explore these questions and provides some recommendations for how evaluation officers in foundations can conceptualize community and community engagement, and determine the purpose of building relationships with community leaders.

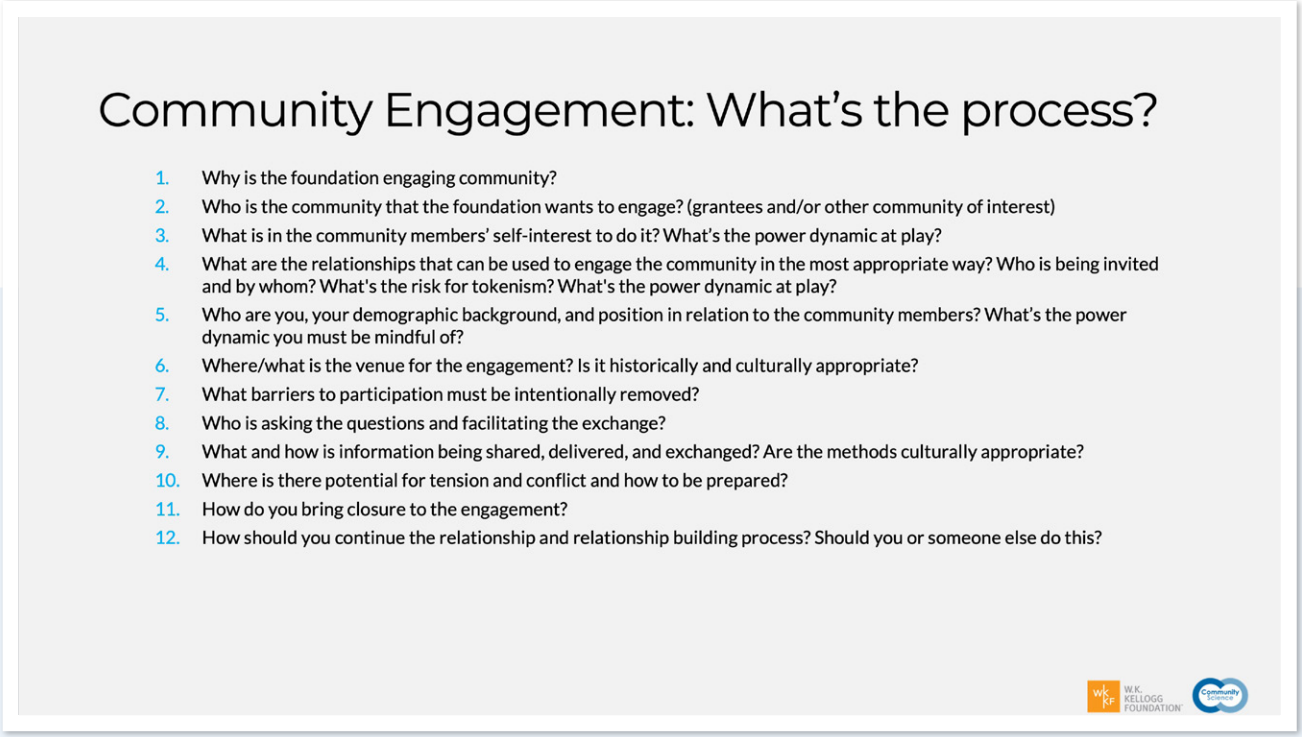
SLIDE: Community Engagement Is Necessary Everywhere



The importance of engaging community shows up everywhere in evaluation, learning, and continuous improvement processes.

- In the planning stage, you need to hear from people who have been historically excluded and who experience disparities in health, education, housing, and other well-being outcomes to understand, from their perspectives, their encounters with the institutions and systems that are supposed to serve and support them.
- In the design stage, you want to ask community members the markers or signals of progress and positive outcomes.
- In the implementation stage, you must make sure that the data are collected through methods that attend to community members' cultures, languages, and contexts.
- In the reflection and learning stage, you want to invite community members to co-interpret and reflect on the findings and their implications.

SLIDE: Community Engagement: What's the process?



Community engagement isn't a difficult process, but it does require intentionality, thoughtfulness, and careful planning. If not done properly and treated with care, it can do more harm than good. Here are 12 questions you should ask yourself as you plan to engage community in evaluation.

Community engagement isn't a difficult process

You can start by asking, why is the foundation engaging community and who is the community it's trying to engage? Then, you consider what's in it for community members and what power dynamics are at play? What existing relationships can be leveraged to initiate contact and relationship building? In the middle of this, you also should consider your own demographic background, position, and other considerations in relation to the people you want to engage.

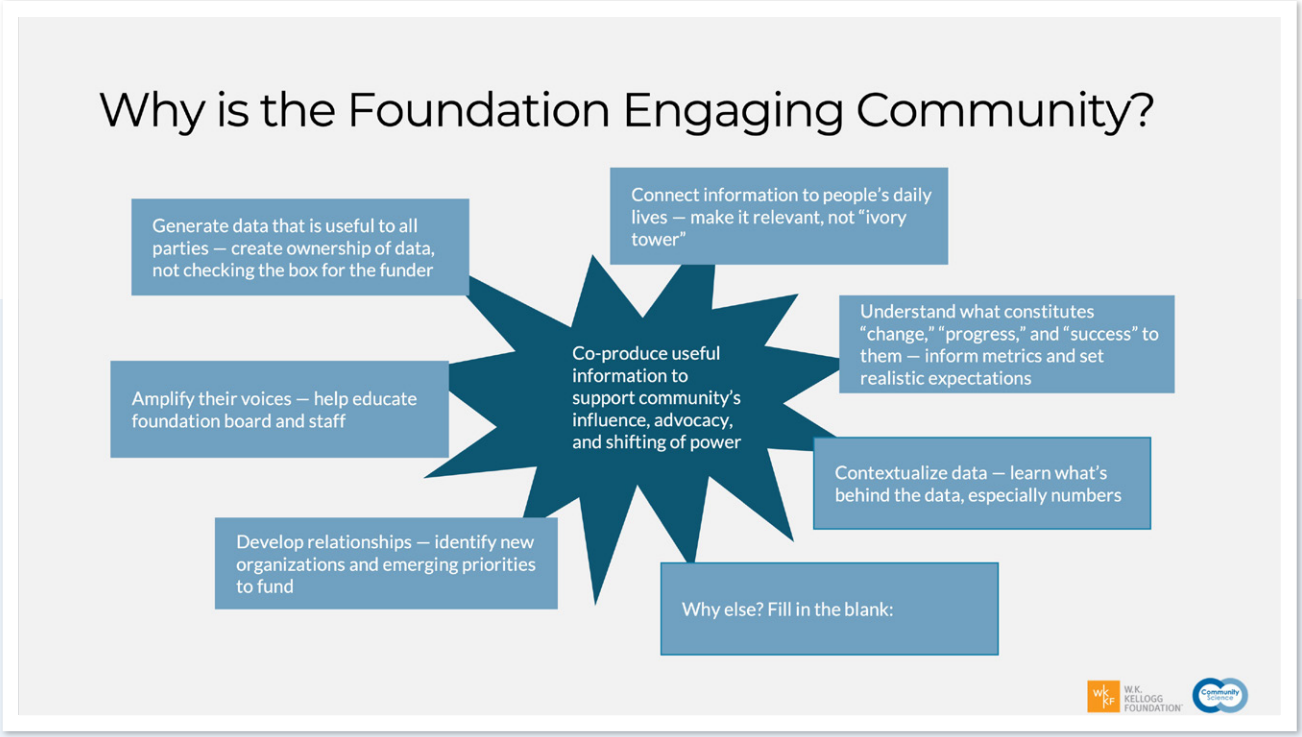
The next set of questions focuses more on the logistics of engagement — what is the venue for the engagement, what are the barriers to participation that must be intentionally removed, who is asking the questions and facilitating exchanges between the foundation and the community, and what is the information being exchanged? Are all these methods appropriate for the cultures of the people you want to engage? You must also be prepared for potential tension or conflict between individuals, and perhaps who they represent. The last two steps are concerned with bringing closure to the engagement, and whether and how you might continue the relationship and relationship building process?

We're going to dive into each question and step, but first, let's pause and ask, which of the 12 things do you think you do well? How about the foundation you work for or with, which of these 12 things do you think it does well?

Checklist for Planning Community Engagement Process

- Why is the foundation engaging community?
- Who is the community that the foundation wants to engage? (grantees or other community of interest)
- What is in the community members' self-interest to do it? What's the power dynamic at play?
- What are the relationships that can be used to engage the community in the most appropriate way? Who is being invited and by whom? What's the risk for tokenism? What's the power dynamic at play?
- Who are you — your demographic background and position — in relation to the community members? What's the power dynamic you must be mindful of?
- Where and what is the venue for the engagement? Is it historically and culturally appropriate?
- What barriers to participation must be intentionally removed?
- Who is asking the questions and facilitating the exchange?
- What and how is information being shared, delivered, and exchanged? Are the methods culturally appropriate?
- Where is there potential for tension and conflict and how can you be prepared?
- How do you bring closure to the engagement?
- How should you continue the relationship building process? Should you or someone else do this?

SLIDE: Why is the Foundation Engaging Community? 1/4



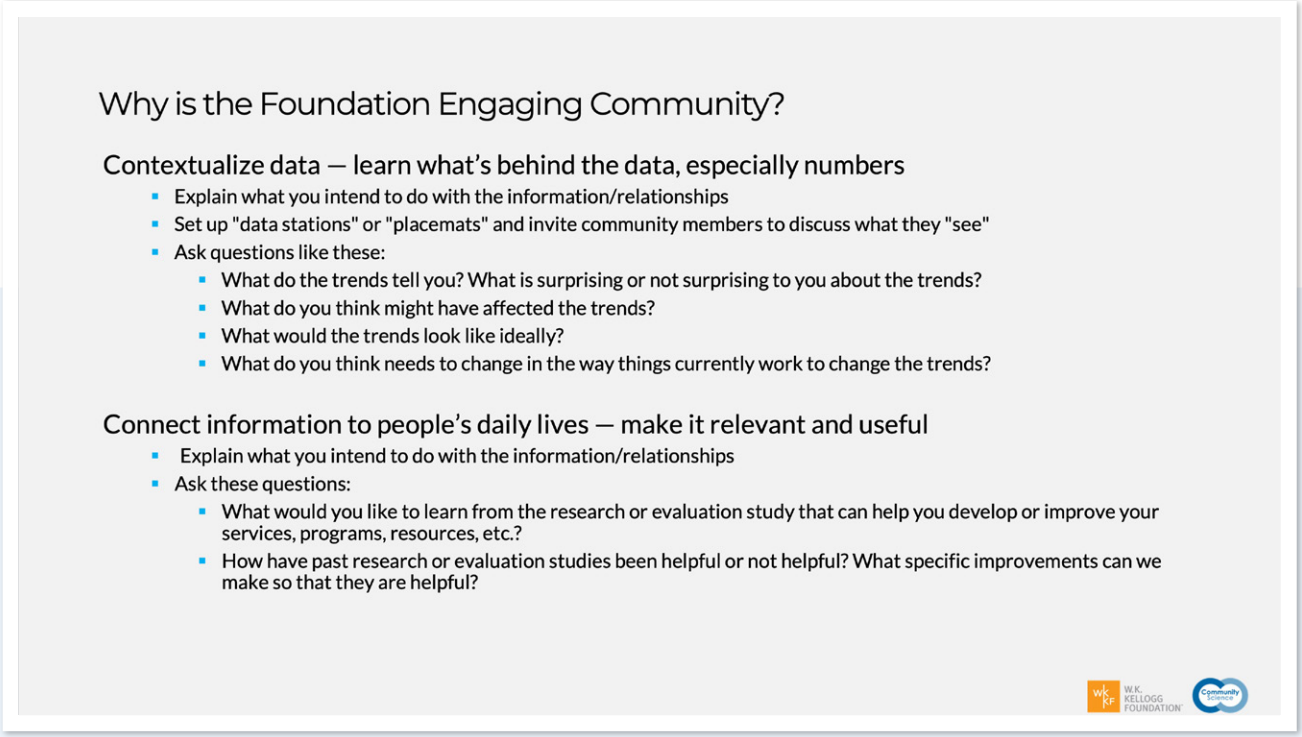
In evaluations in service of racial equity, the primary goal for the foundation to engage community — through evaluation and learning — is to co-produce useful information to support the community's influence, advocacy, and shifting of power (see Practice Guide on Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepening Community Engagement).

To fulfill this goal, the foundation can engage community to do one or more of the following:

- Generate data that is useful to all parties and create ownership of the data;
- Amplify the voices of those who are typically and historically excluded and let those voices help educate the foundation board and staff;
- Develop relationships in order to identify new organizations and emerging priorities to fund;
- Connect information to people's daily lives to ensure that the information is relevant and not produced by or reflective of "ivory tower" thinking;
- Understand what constitutes "change," "progress," and "success" to inform metrics and set realistic expectations; and
- Contextualize data to learn what's behind it, especially if the data are quantitative in nature.

Why else do you think your foundation wants to engage community? You can add new boxes to the slide.

SLIDE: Why is the Foundation Engaging Community? 2/4



This slide and the next two go into more detail about each of the reasons we just reviewed. Ensuring the community knows what you intend to do with the information — and the relationship with the people who share information with you — is necessary no matter your reason for engaging community. You will see this requirement show up in the next several slides in addition to other considerations.

It's crucial that you share the data in easily digestible ways.

On this slide, one of the purposes of engaging community is to be able to contextualize data through the eyes of community members who experience disparities and inequity. It's crucial that you share the data in easily digestible ways. One helpful method is to set up "data stations" where at each, someone can provide an overview of the data and solicit feedback from community members. Another method is to invite community members to a meal, visualize the data on placemats, and assign a person to facilitate a discussion over food. Examples of questions you can ask include:

- What do the trends tell you? What is surprising or not surprising to you about the trends?
- What do you think might have affected the trends?
- What would the trends look like ideally?
- What do you think needs to change in the way things currently work to change the trends?

Another purpose for engaging community is to make sure that the information you collect is relevant, useful, and connected to people's lives. For instance, if you want to make transportation more accessible, affordable, and equitable, you want to know about community members' experience with how they can safely and inexpensively get to their jobs, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, and other resources, and not just analyze secondary data about type of transportation and commuting time.

SLIDE: Why is the Foundation Engaging Community? 3/4



A third reason for engaging community is to hear directly from community members and amplify their voices, especially of those who have been historically dismissed, diminished, and excluded. You can use their stories, with their permission of course, to educate the foundation's board and leadership and make the case for more responsive and impactful grant strategies.

A fourth and a common reason, is to understand what "change," "progress," and "success" mean and look like from the perspectives of those who have been historically excluded. Frequently, evaluators work closely with program staff to identify indicators and measures of change, from the foundation's viewpoint in response to their trustees' expectations. These expectations are likely unreasonable because the individuals don't likely have direct experience with the problem they're attempting to solve nor can they fully understand the forces that shape people's daily lives. As such, asking community members what type of change they're likely to see, hear about, and experience can help the foundation be more targeted in its strategies, understand the complexities involved, and manage expectations.

SLIDE: Why is the Foundation Engaging Community? 4/4



An equally important purpose for engaging community is to ensure that the evaluation and learning generate data and insights that are useful to everyone, including community members, and help everyone feel that the data are theirs to use, not only for the funder or only to fulfill a funder's requirement. This means that part of your task is to build community members' knowledge and skills about data collection, analysis, and use — not to become data scientists, but to have enough proficiency to ensure that the data are not used to mispresent their community and do harm.

Last but not least, the foundation might want to engage the community and develop new relationships to identify new organizations and emerging priorities to fund. Through an intentional process, the foundation can learn more about the social networks and sources of support for communities. Through these relationships, staff can better understand — firsthand — the strengths and concerns of community members. This curiosity on the foundation's part demonstrates a strength-based approach and generates knowledge about the informal and formal community leadership and networks.

SLIDE: Who is the Community that You as Evaluation Officer and the Foundation Want to Engage?

Who is the Community that You as Evaluation Officer and the Foundation Want to Engage?

- Foundation's program and other staff
- Grantees
- Other communities of interest
  - Don't assume that people who share similar racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and other attributes belong to the same community
  - Community exists inside relationships that:
    - Ensure the basic needs of members are met
    - Promote the identity, culture, and language of members
    - Define members' social boundaries by providing opportunities for them to interact only with one other
    - Provide connection to heritage and roots
    - Become an avenue for helping members understand their environment

The reasons for why you want to engage community will determine who in the community you want to connect with. If you define community as a network of relationships bounded by a common interest, goal, or identity, there could be many "communities" you might want to engage — again, depending on the purpose of the engagement.



As the evaluation officer, one community could be the foundation's program and other staff. Often, you will need to collaborate with your colleagues responsible for programming, communications, operations, and more. Another obvious community are grantees who might be part of a larger initiative. There are also other communities that you may want to connect with that may be defined by geographic location, profession or trade, demographic attribute, heritage, etc.



Let's pause and think about the community or communities you are planning to engage or are engaging.

- Why are you engaging them?
- Are you connecting with the appropriate people in the community?
- Do you need to adjust your community engagement plan and tactics?



SLIDE: What is in Everyone's Self-interest to Engage?



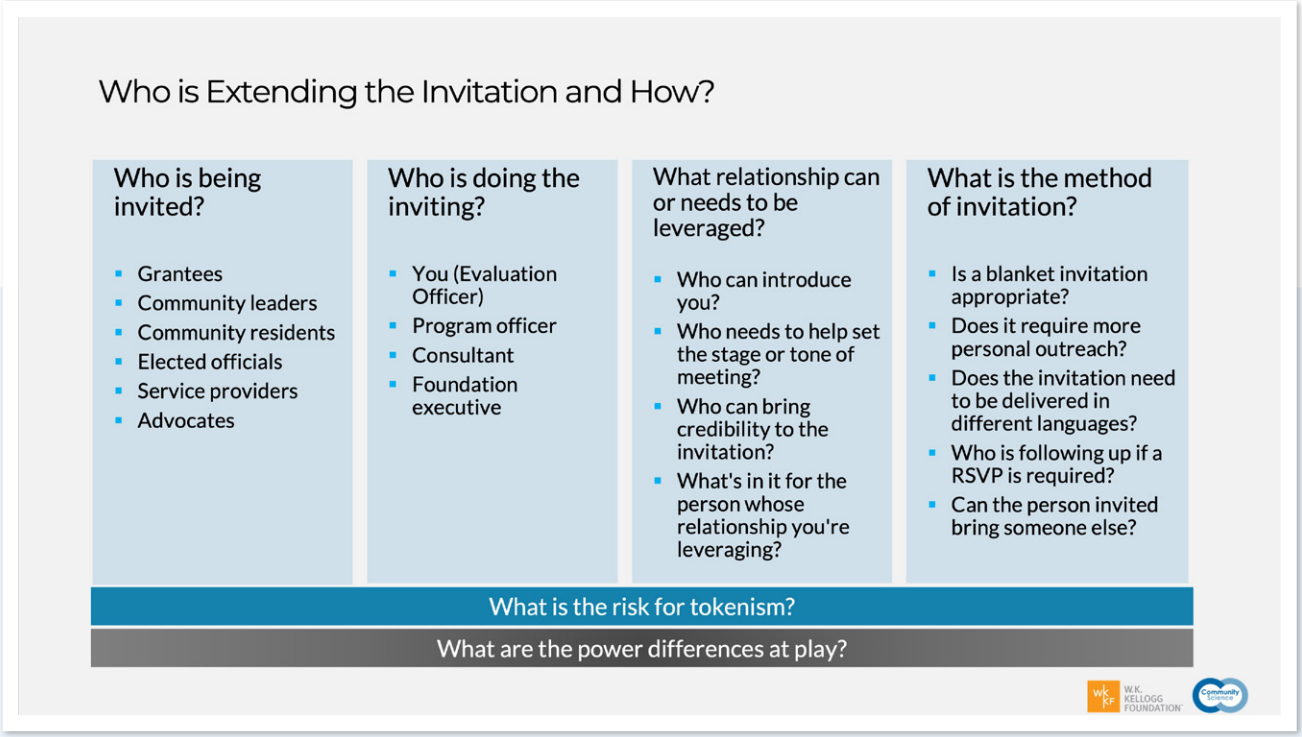
People will often decide to engage with you (the evaluation officer) and help you if you already have a relationship with them. If you don't, it's worth it to find out why people might want to engage with you, the foundation, and one another.

You must be attentive to the power differences at play

For instance, as the evaluator officer, you might be motivated to reach out to community members to enhance your report to the board, to ensure the programs you're evaluating center equity, and to encourage grantees to collect the needed data. Program staff might be interested in collaborating to see if you can gather information about potential partners and emerging priorities as part of the evaluation. Grantees want to comply with the foundation's requirements in hopes to receive more funding or deepen relationships with program officers and you to strengthen their position with the foundation. Members of other communities might have similar self-interests.

As part of the process of understanding and leveraging everyone's self-interests, you must be attentive to the power differences at play. You, as a representative of the foundation, will always hold a position of power because you're perceived as associated with resources and decisions that can affect the grantee's funding. There might even be power differences among grantees or the communities of interest that you should try to understand and prepare for as part of the engagement process.

SLIDE: Who is Extending the Invitation and How?



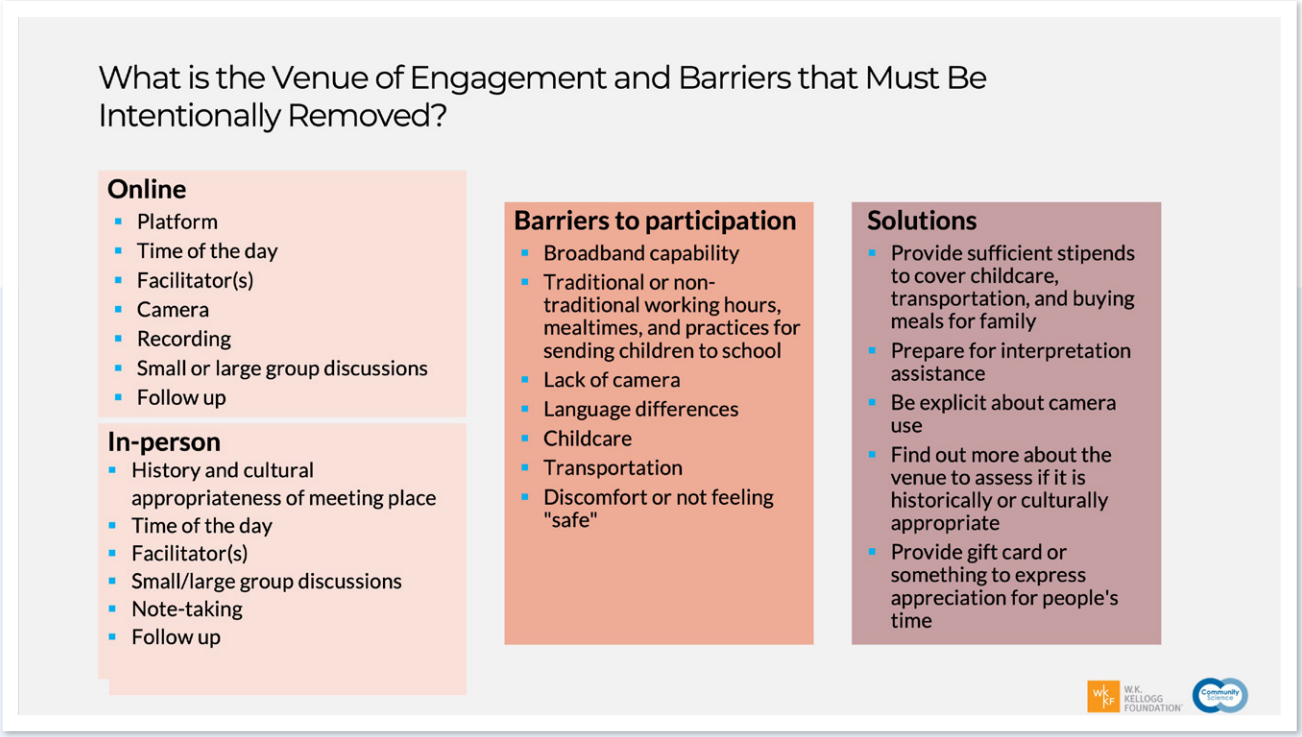
Who extends the invitation using which method is an important detail. Sometimes, the invitation can come directly from you, the evaluation officer, or from program officers. Other times, you or a program officer may need a grantee or community leader with whom there is already an existing relationship to broker a new relationship. A blanket invitation may be acceptable, but a new delicate relationship may require a personal phone call. In certain cases, the person being invited might feel more comfortable or confident if they could bring someone with them.

Be careful, nevertheless, of the risk for tokenism

For example, in a project to decrease community members' opposition to undocumented day laborers, the invitation from the funder to participate in a series of community meetings had to be brokered by legal advocates trusted by the day laborers. Also, the funder asked the day laborers to bring their friends so they could feel confident in numbers compared to the number of white resident leaders.

Be careful, nevertheless, of the risk for tokenism when you decide to who invite and how. There are no clear solutions other than to check your reason (or the foundation's) for inviting a particular person to be part of the community engagement process.

SLIDE: Who is Extending the Invitation and How?



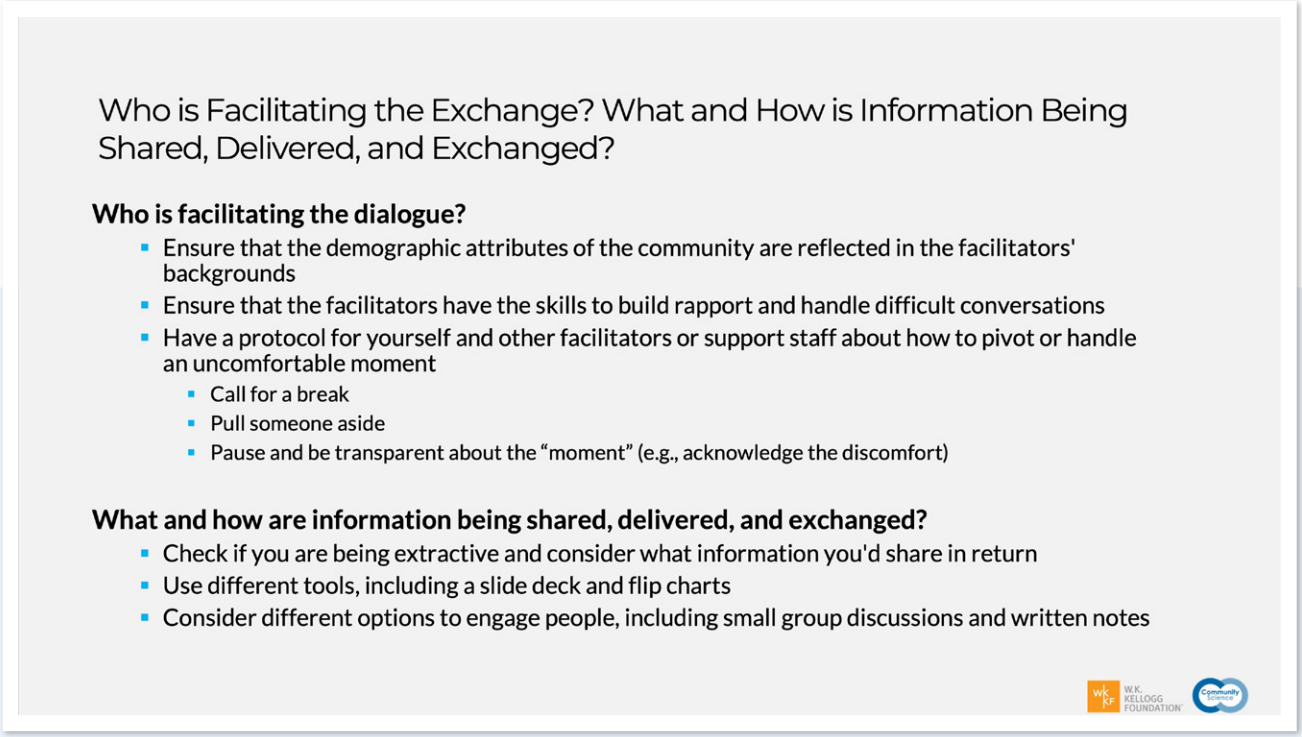
Engagement can occur in-person or virtually. If virtual, there are several considerations to keep in mind:

- Participants should be familiar with the platform you intend to use;
- Activities should occur during times that are convenient for the participants and not the foundation (remember that some people cannot take time off during the day to participate);
- Effective facilitation is necessary;
- Permission should be sought when using the camera and recording meetings;
- Small and large group discussions should be used to engage the participants; and
- There should be clear follow-up and next steps.

In-person engagement is not that different. It's crucial in this format to consider the history and cultural appropriateness of the meeting place. Some places may carry negative histories for certain populations.

There are also barriers to participation that need to be intentionally removed, including whether participants have broadband access to attend virtual activities, have traditional or non-traditional working hours, have children they need to send to or pick up from school, lack a camera for virtual meetings, require translation and interpretation assistance, need childcare during the meetings, require transportation to attend, and risk feeling discomfort or unsafe due to the venue or discussion. The foundation can provide resources and assistance to remove these barriers, from providing stipends or gift cards to covering childcare and transportation costs to securing translators and interpreters.

SLIDE: Who is Facilitating the Exchange? What and How is Information Being Shared, Delivered, and Exchanged?

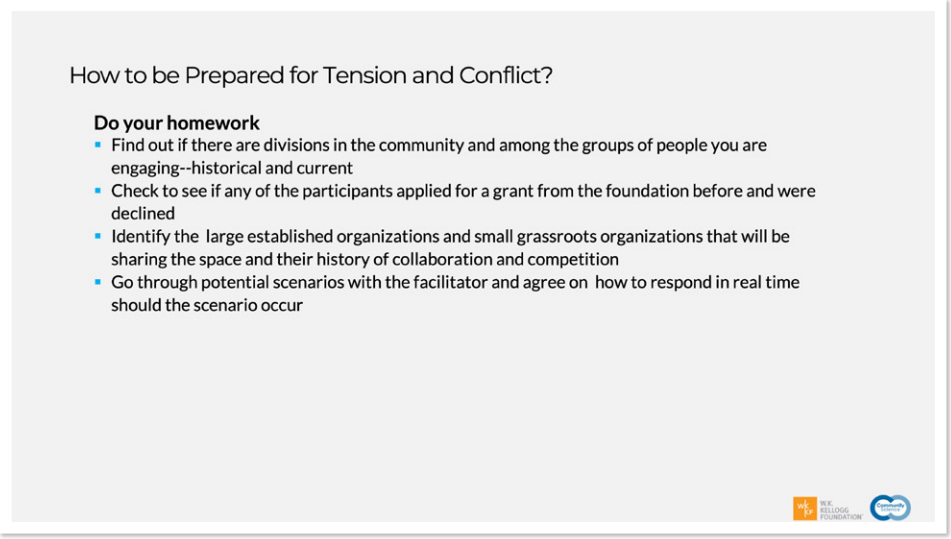


Effective facilitation — thoughtful, inclusive, and intentional — is essential for any community engagement activity or process. There are a few considerations to ensure effective facilitation, including making sure that the facilitators have experiences that are relatable to participating community members and are skilled in building rapport and handling difficult conversations. As the person responsible for community engagement, you might also want to co-create a protocol with them for handling uncomfortable moments.



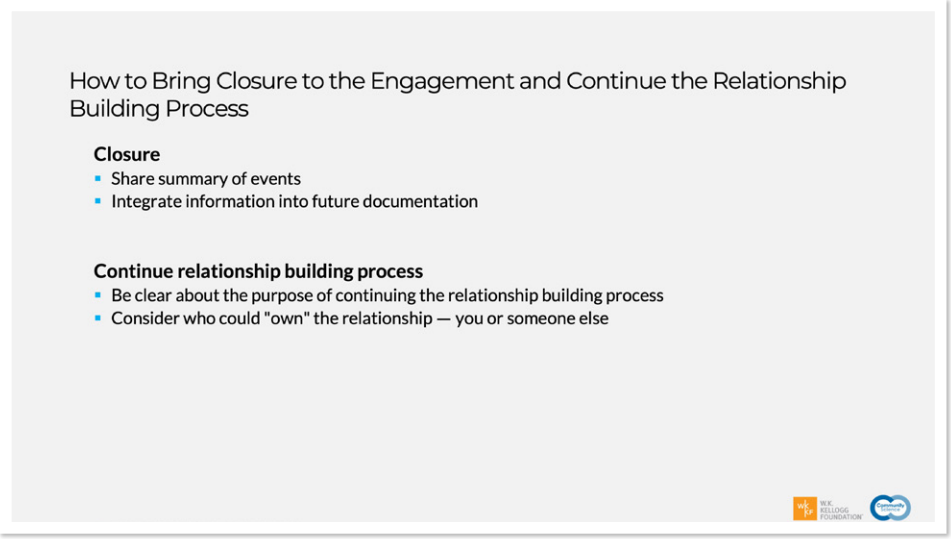
Before, during, and after a meeting, information is most likely being shared, delivered, and exchanged. While it sounds simple, it's important that you think about this process, including whether you are being extractive by taking information from community members and not giving any information in return, and whether you need different formats in response to people with different learning styles.

SLIDE: How to be Prepared for Tension and Conflict?



Disagreement, tension, and even conflict is inevitable in any human interaction and you need to be prepared for it. There aren't any quick or easy answers, but you might want to do your homework ahead of time and find out if there are any historical or current divisions in the community you are trying to engage. For instance, if you are engaging a community of program officers, there could be disagreements about program strategies, or if you are engaging a community of grantees, there might be tension between grantees that are grassroots organizations and those that are large established intermediaries. You might also want to check if any of the community members applied for a grant from the foundation before and were declined. Another way to prepare is to work through potential scenarios with your facilitator and agree on how you could respond to tension or conflict in real time.

SLIDE: How to Bring Closure to the Engagement and Continue the Relationship Building Process



Finally, you want to be clear about the next steps and provide community members with some sort of summary or communication to bring closure to the engagement. At this point, you also want to weigh the extent to which you should continue the relationship building process, for what purpose, and who might "own" the relationship from thereon. Not every engagement or relationship needs to continue in perpetuity — it's about the purpose of the engagement and relationship.

SLIDE: Reflection



Consider everything that was just shared about engaging community with the goal of co-producing useful information to support a community's influence, advocacy, and shifting of power.

- What are your key takeaways?
- What additional resources and capacities might you need?
- What conditions facilitate or challenge your ability to engage community?

Community engagement is a process, and it won't always go smoothly. Take the time to reflect after each event or process and consider how you can continuously get better at engaging community to influence, advocate, and shift power by using evaluation.

How Practitioners of Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity Can Engage Community: A Set of Questions to Help You Get Started

Most of us agree that we should engage community members in evaluation. Typically, we ask community members to inform the theory of change, logic model, and measures of success, and to help interpret the findings. So, what would we do differently if committed to evaluations in service of racial equity?

We would be deliberate about sharing information that can contribute to community members' ability to influence decisions that affect their access to resources and opportunities and their treatment by those in power. We would work to ensure that the community members' interests and priorities are at the forefront of funders, organizations, and policymakers' agendas. This is meaningful community engagement — responsible, responsive, and genuine engagement without tokenizing community members — and it goes beyond how community engagement is typically practiced in evaluation. And, this is hard. We'll probably not get it right the first, second, or third time, but we must keep trying.



We know that these objections and challenges come up time and again when we work to engage community, and we have to overcome them:

The Value-free Debate. We are sidelined by debates inside and outside the evaluation profession about whether evaluation should be value-free and impartial, or whether evaluation should intentionally promote racial equity through its methodologies, as if they are mutually exclusive. This debate creates a false dichotomy, wasting precious time that we can use to hone the practice of evaluation that is in service of racial equity and scientifically rigorous.

The "We Aren't Community Organizers" Rebuke. We don't work on the frontlines of community change, but we can help build community capacity to use data to drive the change community leaders want to see. We can help people who direct nonprofits, advocate for social justice, and lead community change — who are not immersed in the practice of evaluation — about what they can expect from evaluations that are in service of racial equity, and not be confused about rhetoric, philosophies, and the like. Simply put, they need to know what an evaluation could look like that supports and strengthens their work to achieve racial equity.

What is another objection or challenge? How can you address it?

Evaluators working in service of racial equity have to operationalize what it means to engage in a way that moves the community toward developing the power to influence decisions that affect their lives. Here are some questions that we can ask as part of the engagement process throughout the evaluation.[1]

Getting started. As we begin engaging our evaluation, we can ask community members:

- What do you want to learn from the evaluation to help you advocate for systems, policies, and practices that help to ensure your community has fair access to resources and opportunities?
- What does change and success look or feel like that will signal progress toward racial equity?
- How do you want your story to be told to ensure no harm is done to your community, and more importantly, to help change narratives about your community?
- What experiences have you had, if any, with past evaluations and what was helpful or not?
- What is meaningful involvement to you that doesn't look or feel like tokenism?
- What can get in the way of your involvement?
- (Jot down other questions you can ask)

Planning. As you continue to plan the evaluation, you can ask community members:

- Are we still adhering to the agreements? Which ones have we been less successful in adhering to? Why do you think that is the case? What agreements might we need to change?
- Are there any emerging opportunities and challenges affecting your community that the evaluation could help you tackle? Is there any data the evaluation can provide to assist you?
- Where can the evaluation and we, as the evaluator, do better to support the community and the pursuit of racial equity?
- Aside from the evaluation, is the initiative supporting the community as intended? Why or why not?
- (Jot down other questions you can ask)

Implementation. When you move into implementation, you want to keep asking:

- Do the findings help you and your community advocate for more equitable policies, systems, and practices, and reduce disparities? Why or why not?
- What is the story to be told? Who should tell it and who should hear it?
- Which parts need to be framed carefully to prevent negative consequences for the community?
- Which parts of the story can be shared publicly, and which can't? Who decides this and when?
- What reports or evaluation products could generate support for your advocacy for racial equity?
- What needs to be improved in the evaluation?
- (Jot down other questions you can ask)



We acknowledge that evaluators' capacity to ask and answer these questions are shaped in part by the:

- Amount of resources available for community engagement;
- Length of time for the engagement process;
- Mindsets and behaviors of funders, organizations doing the work, evaluators, and others about the function of evaluation beyond collecting, analyzing, and reporting data;
- Facilitation skills of the evaluator; and
- Willingness of the funder or the organization leading the work to share the power of decision-making with community leaders.

Despite the real challenges and guardrails that come up for us as evaluators, it's time for us to shift our focus to how we practice evaluation in a way that facilitates racial equity, learn from our experiences, and keep pushing the practice forward.

tip sheet

How to Respond to Scenarios about Engaging Community in Evaluation

Overview

The Practice Guide *Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement* provides suggestions on how to incorporate and align the core value of authentic community engagement into evaluation practice, as one critical path toward racial equity. However, community engagement often sounds easier than it actually is, and we can get "stuck" at various stages. Evaluators raised questions related to challenges they face when attempting to apply the suggestions in the guide. Those prompted this tip sheet which provides a set of common scenarios and related questions that evaluators have faced when engaging community along with tangible ways to help get "unstuck."



Scenerio 1

I have to include community voice in the evaluation process, but the funder has a short time frame and small budget. There is no way I can do everything the funder wants and still be authentic in my engagement of the community. How should I approach this problem?

The practice guide explains that a necessary role for evaluators working in service of racial equity is to ensure they take the time to learn about the community they're studying with the rationale that, "If we, as evaluators, are learning about a community as we should be, we can articulate things about the community that we didn't know before. We should also find our assumptions about the community being challenged by our new knowledge." Getting to know the community is a foundational step in doing evaluation work that centers community engagement — where "community members most affected by the work that is being funded and evaluated are involved in the evaluation" and their "interests and priorities are in the forefront of funders', organizations', and policymakers' agendas," according to the guide. Getting to know the community, furthermore, can orient evaluators and program implementers to an asset-based perspective which acknowledges that there is a lot to learn from and with community, rather than a perspective that assumes the community only has needs which can be solved by benefitting from a particular strategy or program (Hood, Campbell, & Baker, 2023).

Evaluation budgets must allow and account for community engagement if funders and evaluators are committed to it as a critical path toward doing evaluation in service of racial equity. Activities to get to know the community are not usually part of traditional evaluation budgets. Changing the way we're contracted and how evaluations are practiced in service of racial equity is not the evaluators' responsibility alone. Funders and organizations who are part of the ecosystem of grantmaking, implementation, capacity-building, research and evaluation, and advocacy must also be willing to change the way they contract, grant, implement, and practice.

Decide what's right and comfortable for you.

Community engagement should be treated as important as other methodological matters, such as validity and reliability. It shouldn't be compromised or traded-off with another methodological matter. Until funders recognize this and are willing to allocate resources to it as part of the process, evaluators are limited in how much they can do within existing budgets and how much they're willing to do beyond what's minimally expected to ensure a rigorous evaluation.

Educate funders

Evaluators have a responsibility to educate funders about the importance of allocating the proper amount of time and resources for community engagement. We can do the following:

Explain why time spent getting to know the community matters:

To have real community input that informs the theory of change, outcomes and indicators, and measures of progress, evaluators need to understand who the community is and how it's structured and organized.

- This understanding will help evaluators identify who in the community can accurately describe the context within which the initiative or program is taking place, check the assumptions underlying the initiative, ground the evaluation in reality, co-design the evaluation, and ensure it generates insights that can shift power to the community.
- Accurate information will increase the likelihood that the initiative or program's progress (or lack thereof) will be evaluated and measured appropriately.

Work with the funder to determine how best to compensate community members for participating:

A key component of true partnership with the community includes fair and appropriate compensation to community members for their time. Too often, community members' time is seen as being offered for free, which devalues them as equal partners.

- There is no agreement in the literature about the "right" amount of compensation for adult or youth participants.
- It is not enough for funders and evaluators to determine what the compensation would be for the community. A key step is to find out what the community members themselves regard as fair for what they are being asked to do, and also what they value as compensation — a gift card, cash, donation, pro bono service, etc.
- It would be better to reduce the number of participants and pay each one of them fairly rather than have a large sample size and pay each only a small and token compensation.

Be prepared to describe the trade-offs if the budget or timeline don't suffice:

Evaluation budgets and timelines are typically not sufficient to support the full extent of community engagement.

- A systematic analysis of the gain, risk, and loss of not engaging the community to the full extent can be helpful to conduct, share, and negotiate with the funder.
- Community engagement activities shouldn't be scaled back to allow for the full extent of data collection. Instead, consider how to reduce data collection to be able to still meaningfully engage the community. For example, being able to offer fair compensation to a smaller number of participants can help participants feel valued and engaged.

Scenerio 2

I have reached out to the community leaders we're supposed to contact as part of the evaluation. But I haven't heard from them. I don't really have relationships with these leaders, but if I tell them it's part of the evaluation of Foundation X's initiative to build community capacity, including an infrastructure for policy advocacy and other efforts to effect systems change, why am I not hearing back?

Spend time building relationships and here are some ways to help you do that.



- Be thoughtful about planning time in interviews, focus groups, and site visits to build rapport and share information about who you are and why you're interested in the evaluation topic.
- Have a conversation with the participants using a semi-structured guide rather than reading from questionnaire or form, do your homework to understand the person you're engaging, and be curious about the their interests and viewpoints — they aren't "subjects."
- Meet people where they're physically comfortable and it's convenient for them, not for you.
- Identify and team up with people who already have relationships to assist you.
- If a relationship is built, natural connections, interests, and other concerns will emerge so that over time, the relationship becomes less transactional.

Evaluators may believe they're doing everything possible to reach the communities they want to work with. However, it could be the words and communication style that result in little response (as opposed to lack of interest). According to the guide, "Evaluators have a tendency to use jargon and mystify evaluation by using technical concepts and terms to describe scientific rigor and the methods they use."

Consider the language evaluators use in outreach efforts:

- How much of the communication used to invite community leaders and other stakeholders to participate uses language and jargon that people who haven't made a profession out of evaluation or community engagement would understand? Some terms that have become part of the jargon used by funders, evaluators, and other community and systems change practitioners include "power," "capacity building," "empowerment," "mixed methods," "technical assistance," "bring to the table," and "lived experiences," among others.
- Although these terms are routinely used in the evaluation profession and need no explanation in these circles, the same may not be true for those outside of this context. For example, immigrants and refugees from authoritarian governments may associate the word "power" with the military or dictatorship. Similarly, people in community may have no idea what "technical assistance" or "mixed methods" mean. If the people with whom you want to partner don't see your messaging as engaging and relevant or if they have to puzzle over what you're offering and asking of them, you miss an opportunity to pique their interest and thus get a response.
- What can you do?
  - Define terms to make them more tangible to the communities you're working with. They can be talked about in ways that are relevant to how the community might use them. Imagine explaining to somebody who has nothing to do with your profession.
    - "Capacity building" could be talked about in terms of the knowledge, skills, resources, and relationships needed to achieve their goals. "Technical assistance" could be explained as the support offered to help the organization or community acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, expertise, and resources needed to solve their problems. "Power" could be translated to their ability to get what they want and to make decisions that affect their lives.
    - Consider the cultures and experiences of the people you're working with. What words are relevant, resonant, and meaningful? What words could have negative connotations or be offensive in another culture or context?



Scenerio 3

People tend not to like evaluators, I know that. But I have a job to do. What can I do differently to show that the evaluation can be beneficial to the community? I'm also uncomfortable about how the community members I've spoken to seem to associate me with the foundation. They keep telling me that they hope the evaluation will show how important their work is and persuade the foundation to renew their grant.



One of the first steps is to recognize communities' past experiences with evaluators. Ask community leaders and community members in your first interaction, "When you think of evaluation, what comes to mind," "When have you had a positive or negative experience with evaluation and evaluators," and "What do you wish the evaluator did differently." Listen, really listen, and make sure you don't repeat the behaviors that were disingenuous, disrespectful, and harmful.

The reality is that evaluators do have a relationship with funders and often funding decisions are tied to evaluation findings. While evaluators can do their best to be good partners to communities, a range of circumstances and decisions outside of their control can affect relationships with community leaders and others participating in evaluations. According to the practice guide, it's important for you to "be mindful about who you are working for or contracted by because your affiliation with the funder or organization can affect people's perceptions and assumptions about you. If community members are skeptical about the funder or organization, you have to explore why they feel this way and be honest with the funder or organization about what you learned. You also must be careful not to replicate the funder or organization's practices that contribute to the community members' skepticism, be transparent with community members about the purpose of the evaluation, and ensure that community members are meaningfully engaged in the evaluation. While evaluators are not responsible for repairing the relationship between the funder or organization and community members, they are responsible for ensuring that the evaluation provides information that could improve the relationship and more important, not do further harm."

Manage upstream

Communities often have deeply entrenched challenges that funders aren't prepared to address.

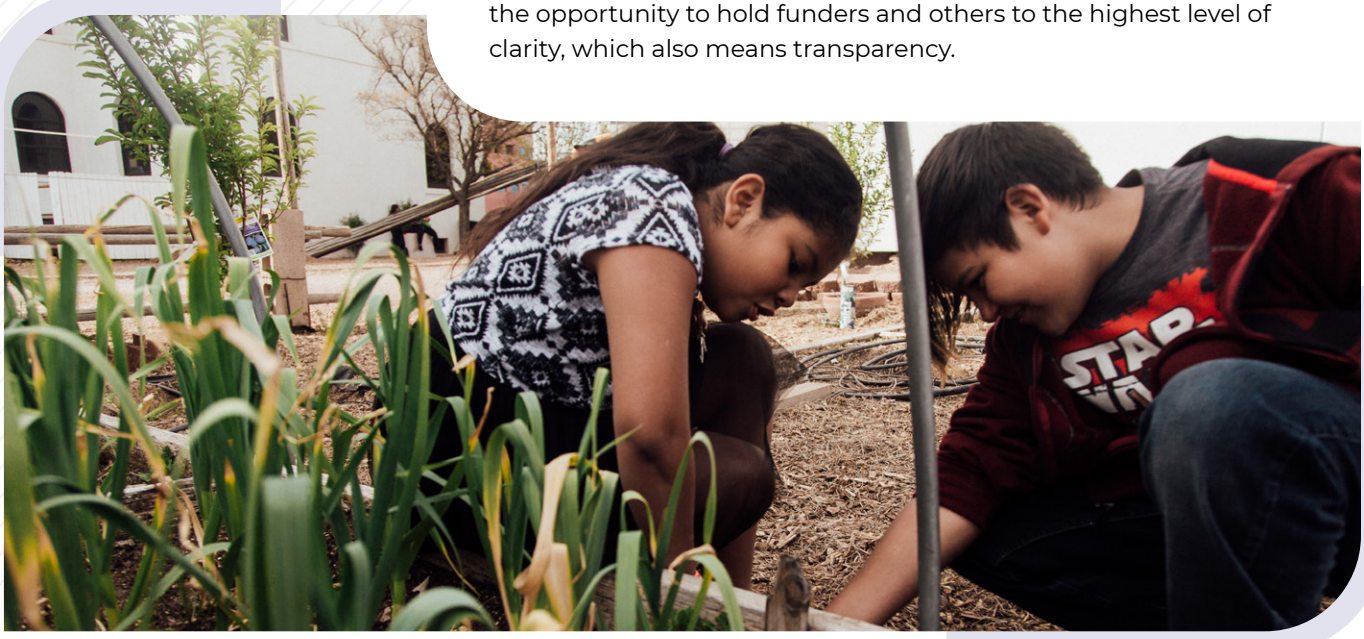
Funders often respond in one of two ways: 1) overpromise or 2) stay silent on the issues. Evaluators can raise this tension during the development or revision of the theory of change and logic model by querying the funder's assumptions and helping to clearly articulate what the grant initiative or program can and cannot do, and what the funder is prepared to do and not do. For example, if maternal health equity is the funder's goal and to achieve this goal requires expanded Medicaid coverage for new mothers, is the funder prepared to advocate at the state level and support advocacy efforts to change the policy? The funder's answer will determine if this outcome appears on the theory of change and logic model, and how grantees and partners respond to the appearance or absence for this outcome.

Create transparency

As with most trusting relationships, transparency is an important element of partnerships with communities.

On page 16 of the practice guide, there are aspects of the evaluation that are important for transparency (e.g., clear process for decisionmaking, clear expectations about roles and timelines, compensation for community participants' time). Additional important areas for transparency includes the decisions that you're able or unable to influence about the criteria for grant renewal, the evaluation design and budget constraints, and the timeline and what might be driving it.

Sometimes funders, evaluators, and other decisionmakers can make the mistake of assuming that the organizations and community leaders with whom they work aren't able to understand, accept, and deal with the constraints and complexities of philanthropy, research, and evaluation. This assumption can come across to grantees and partners as condescending. Funders may also mistakenly associate clarity with being prescriptive and wielding their power. On the contrary, the lack of clear instructions creates incorrect expectations about goals, objectives, and outcomes. We, through the use of the theory of change, logic model, and measurement framework, have the opportunity to hold funders and others to the highest level of clarity, which also means transparency.



Scenerio 4

The funder keeps saying that they don't want to burden the community with evaluation. The grantees say the same thing. They keep saying that the evaluation is taking up a lot of their time, especially the reporting form.

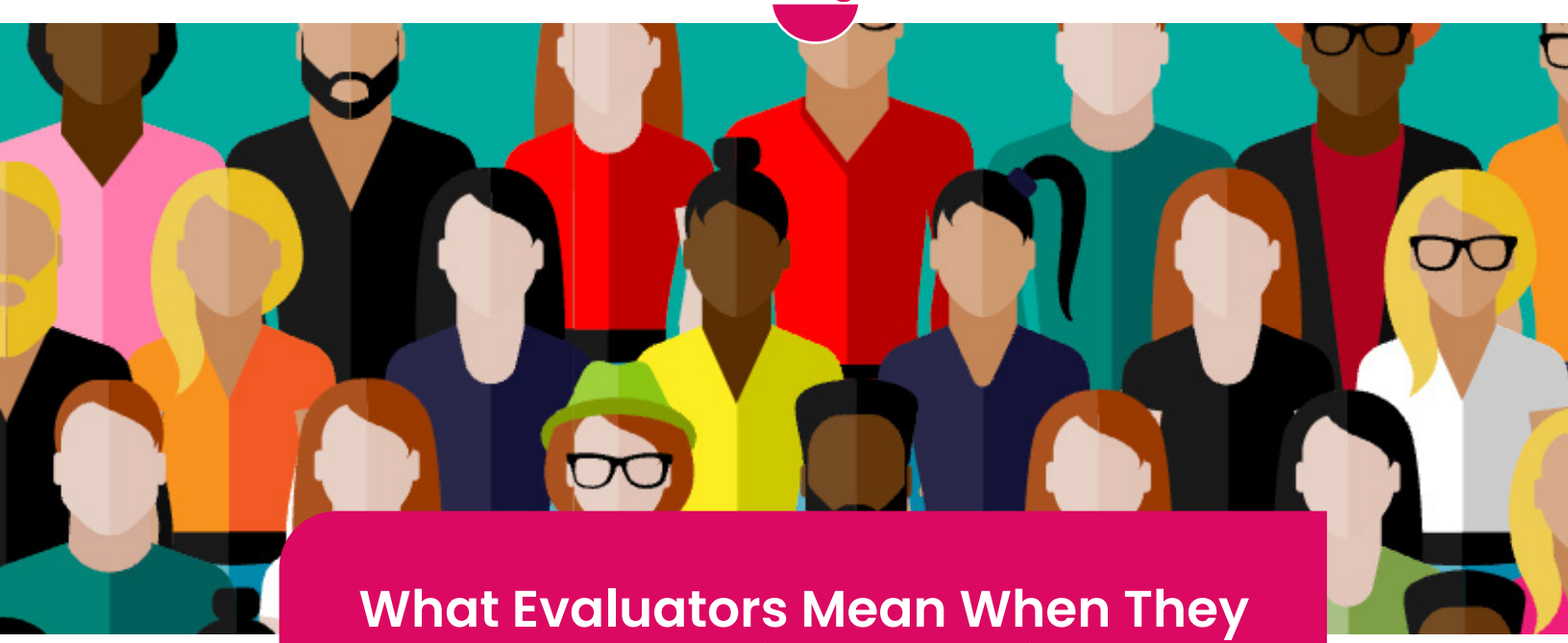


It's common for us to receive feedback that participating in evaluation activities isn't a top priority for program implementers and community participants, and instead tends to be burdensome and get in the way of their actual priorities. This is usually because evaluators tend to think about their and the funders' information needs and not those of program implementers and community participants. Here are some ideas for how to shift the benefits from the evaluation to the community partners:

- Be clear what actually benefits community partners and make sure evaluators can deliver.
  - We can offer free technical assistance (e.g., workshop, webinar) about data collection and use, review data collection instruments for the community partner, or help with interpreting and communicating findings.
  - We can identify resources that community partners might find useful (e.g., promising practices, sources of knowledge they sought).
- Ask community partners what they want to know to be successful so that the evaluation helps generate information they can use to advocate for themselves.
- Work with the funder to determine how we can help grantees complete their progress reports as one of the data collection activities.

Reference

Hood, S., Campbell, B., and Baker, K. (2023). Culturally Informed Community Engagement: Implications for Inclusive Science and Health Equity. RTI Press Publication No. OP-0083- 2301. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press.
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What Evaluators Mean When They Talk About 'Lived Experience'

Community Science

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Recently, my colleague asked, "what is all this with 'lived experience' lately?" I was unsure how to answer because this term had already become a buzzword in my mind. I thought I knew what it meant, but then I couldn't quite define it when asked so directly.

Here are a few of the definitions I found when I went looking:

- Lived experience is a depiction of a person's experiences and decisions, as well as the knowledge gained from these experiences and choices.
- Lived experience is the things that someone has experienced themselves, especially when these give the person a knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have.
- Lived experience belongs to people who have gained knowledge through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events, rather than through assumptions and constructs from other people, research, or media. (Chandler, D., & Munday, R. (2016). Oxford: A dictionary of media and communication (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.)

These definitions started to give the term back its meaning for me — knowledge from direct, first-hand involvement experiences, not simply what someone has heard about or studied.

Over the last few years, I have seen an increase in funders asking for "lived experience" as part of project designs. For example, the federal agency of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) states, "Persons with lived experience and/or their family members should be closely involved in designing and carrying out all data and program evaluation activities."

Rightfully so. For too long, research and public health programs have been designed by people who do not actually have the direct experience of living with specific health conditions or needing the services that programs intend to deliver to be helpful (people in the so-called ivory tower).

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As an evaluator who is moving my practice towards evaluation in service of racial equity, I have had to acknowledge that I should not be the one driving the questions to determine the progress or success of a program, but that information should come from those affected by the issue, program, or designed service. After all, progress and success matter most to them.

Nevertheless, my colleague's comment helped me hit pause on my understanding of "lived experience" and explore what I know and don't know. The overarching questions that arose are:

- How do we know when we have effectively involved people with lived experience in our evaluations?
- How do we know we are meeting the intended outcomes to engaging people with lived experience?

There are implications when thinking of incorporating people with lived experience and although there are things that we are not always thinking about in practice, there are resources we can consult and put into practice. Those who study phenomenology and evaluators following Utilization-Focused Evaluation and Community Based Participatory Evaluation as well as other frameworks may be able to apply tenets and principles from these frameworks to answer the specific concerns and deeper questions I have posed here.

It Needs To Be Meaningful

Although my colleague had heard the term "lived experience" many times, it was not easy for her to understand its meaning and relevance, even though there were people in her field asking her to incorporate people with lived experience into her work. It may be because the term has characteristics of being a buzzword. A buzzword is defined as a word or phrase, often an item of jargon, which is fashionable at a particular time or in a particular context.

Incorporating the expertise that comes from a person's lived experience into evaluation questions and data collection methods seems to be progressive in terms of moving power from evaluators to the people who have more direct experience with the subject of study. Undoubtedly, some people have a grounded, intelligent, and earnest sense of what it means to include "lived experience' in their evaluations.

On the other hand, the term is often used with little explanation to the point where name dropping "lived experience" can elevate the description of a research or evaluation study because there is a sense that doing so is positive and desirable.

If the term becomes overly used with little understanding among those who adopt it, it runs the risk of becoming a fashionable buzzword. Soon we could find ourselves incorporating lived experience without really thinking about or understanding how to do so meaningfully because we don't have a substantive, operational framework to guide us. It may become another checkbox among many other checkboxes in evaluation. In addition to a loss of meaningful application, checkboxes contribute to making things sound and look easier than they are. For example, engaging people with lived experience, a form of community engagement, would be undermined if there was not an understanding among people in power that this is not simply done, but rather involves the task of giving up some of their own power.

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Buzzwords come and go. People follow them with little attachment when the next trendy word appears. Is "lived experience" in vogue or here to stay? If incorporating people's lived experience is important to evaluation, let's be intentional about centering its use in a meaningful way and not let it become a buzzword.

It Must Be Specific

Evaluators need definitions. We inherently measure the extent to which things are happening as intended, and thus need defining criteria.

Defining lived experience by saying it is about people with direct experience is not enough to know how to use it in practice in a way that indicates who, what, when, and how much. In order to have meaningful use and buy-in of lived experience, we need a clearer definition in order to operationalize it and measure its success.

This definition is appealing. People who have gained knowledge through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events, rather than through assumptions and constructs from other people, research, or media. (Chandler & Munday, 2011)

But it could also essentially be applied to *all* people who have had experience. This would be all people.

There is work to do. To start, it would be beneficial to identify the type of lived experience. For example:

- What specifically does the experience need to be about?
- If it is related to a study of substance use treatment, is the lived experience that we are looking for from people seeking treatment or undergoing treatment? Furthermore, among that group, is it the specific lived experience of people of color experiencing discrimination by healthcare providers, who have no access to care, and who experience ongoing trauma due to racism?
- Would the lived experience include family members of people who have helped individuals try to access care and navigate treatment?
- Would it include treatment providers?
- Does the experience need to have occurred in the past, or can it be an everyday experience?
- Could it be a one-time experience, or does it need to have occurred multiple times?
- Is it an experience that would have to occur for some time, and if so what length of time counts?

Once there is more clarity in the defining factors, we need to ask to what extent there is a collective understanding of the working definition. A collective understanding will ensure greater transparency and consistency in how lived experience is incorporated into evaluation activities and its successes measured.

It Must Consider Gain and Harm

When asking people with direct experience to be informants to those who are designing evaluations, we need to ask:

- Who stands to gain?
- Who is at risk of being harmed?

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It is noble of evaluators to acknowledge that they should not be the sole determiners of evaluation design and that people with more direct experience with the topic have expertise.

However, enthusiastically inviting people with lived experience to participate on the evaluation team or in an advisory capacity may not play out as well as intended. Examining the structures in which evaluations are conducted is a necessary first step. Evaluation teams are often made up of people employed to conduct evaluations. If people with relevant lived experience are requested to participate, planning their involvement needs to consider that those people are not necessarily paid to do this work, and it very well may be in addition or in opposition to the work they do or to their daily activities. However important to them, involvement may also mean loss of income and/or time for other planned activities.

Furthermore, the context and structures in which the participation takes place must be considered. For example, if individuals with lived experience were invited to participate, we must ask:

- Would it be feasible for them to get to the setting where the employed evaluators are?
- Would they be able to be off work or find childcare during that time?
- Would they be comfortable and feel safe?
- Would they risk any harm or being retraumatized—physical, psychological, or legal—given the location, space, or others involved? What safeguards have been put into practice to minimize these risks?

Evaluators need to think about what is said and the language used.

- Is the language full of jargon that would exclude, and perhaps tax, those unfamiliar and thus limit the expression of their lived experience expertise and full participation?
- Does the language that relates to the area of lived experience convey respect, i.e., have the evaluators done their work to ensure they are using appropriate and person-centered language that will not harm the individuals?
- Has the evaluation team checked their own biases and mental models around this particular type of lived experience?
- Have those who are invited to share their lived experience aware of potential discomfort and have they had a chance to set boundaries on the topics discussed?
- Does the evaluation consider potential translation and interpretation services for participants who are more comfortable expressing themselves in a different language?

With the positive intention of gaining diverse perspectives, evaluators may overlook the systems that people with lived experience have interacted with and how those play a role in their well-being. For example, if an evaluator puts together an evaluation advisory committee made up of people from various parts of the system related to mental illness, they also need to consider the potential experiences these people may have had with each other. A person with experience of untreated mental illness may have had challenging and harmful experiences with treatment providers and law enforcement. Evaluators ought to be intentional and informed when they bring people together in service of their evaluations so that they are not the creators of undue discomfort and power differentials for their own gain.

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SAMHSA has created "Participation Guidelines for Individuals with Lived Experience and Family" in which they describe the need for informed consent to be provided to people with lived experience prior to their participation.

Evaluators can incorporate people with lived experience into their evaluations. However, if it is the evaluator who gains while those with lived experience risk harm, this effort tokenizes people with lived experience, and we can do better by considering reciprocity.

It Is More Than A Number

In evaluation, we look at amounts, both in process and outcome measurements. Incorporating people with lived experience into evaluation activities could be measured in terms of how it is implemented using process measures, and what it led to using outcome measures.

Process measures might include how many people with lived experience were involved. However, it is unclear if any factors have been developed to determine what number would be considered successful. It may be a particular proportion of the evaluation group. On the other hand, a successful number might be a minimum number, no matter the size of the evaluation group. Evaluators can ask:

- How much representation from people of lived experience is needed to be considered meaningful input?
- In terms of the rest of the evaluation team accepting the validity of their expertise, what number of people would be considered sufficient?
- Given the variation in how people experience things and the range of perspectives among those with the lived experience, what factors for that particular lived experience need to be taken into consideration in order to determine the appropriate number to be able to be most representative of that variation?

While determining this number, we also need to acknowledge that a power imbalance may exist within the evaluation team in situations when most people do not have the particular lived experience. Those who bring their lived experience expertise may be questioned, judged, and even discredited by traditional evaluators or other stakeholders. When interacting with historically disenfranchised and excluded populations it is important to establish trust and put checks and balances in place to address any power differentials. People who traditionally have not had power often do not know what to do when it is finally passed to them. This may call for building capacity among the community of people with the lived experience.

Outcome measures, similarly, need careful consideration beyond the numbers. The experience of participation in the evaluation activities as well as the outcome identified by the persons with the lived experience ought to be part of the measurement strategy. Quantitative and qualitative methods may contribute to understanding what the

It is Not a Commodity

Ideally, evaluators are intentional and thoughtful about the people with lived experience who would be appropriate to engage in their current evaluation and would approach these individuals accordingly. In reality, however, convenience factors and existing relationships with people with lived experience often dictate participation. For example, evaluation teams that are under time pressure to

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get their project started might employ structures used in the past to describe the activities, recruit, and set up meetings. This may result in limiting the pool of people who might participate in the evaluation, leading us to question if the people with lived experience who can and do participate in evaluation activities may be different from those who cannot. The people who do participate may, in fact, have common characteristics that make it easier for them to engage. For example, they may be a subset of people who find it easier to take time out of the day when evaluation planning meetings or data collection events occur and can also more easily access the location or web platform used for the meeting. Furthermore, it may be for some common reason they are known to the evaluation team and/or their network of contacts. How might these individuals with common characteristics play a role in influencing the evaluation compared to the individuals who may not share these characteristics?

Rather than approaching the engagement of lived experience as if it is a generic commodity to fill slots where individual differences do not matter, evaluators can be thoughtful and intentional when they plan their evaluations in order for a variety of people (i.e., a diverse sample) with the particular lived experience to be able to participate, leading to richer and more nuanced input. For example, evaluators can create budgets and timelines which make possible a wider outreach period, rather than relying on known contacts. They can also increase accessibility and feasibility to attend by varying the time and location of activities, as well as considering factors of the meeting set-up such as the technology required, the language in which it is conducted, and accessibility supports provided.

It Is Not A One-time Thing

If there is an impetus to create structures in which people with lived experience have a continued and consistent voice in evaluation designs, evaluators need to think about longer-term sustained involvement and relationship. Sustained involvement is needed to potentially make changes in theories of change, measures of success, and data collection methods. There are examples of evaluators setting up a committee or advisory panel including people with lived experience for the purpose of meeting their particular evaluation goals and then dissolving the group once the evaluation is completed. This leaves the person with the lived experience in a place not too different from where they began in terms of the power they have to be able to have ongoing input. Furthermore, it also damages trust and can lead to difficulty of re-engagement. In these cases, the information they provide is used for one purpose. It is transactional. It is not transformative for them or others like them beyond the life of the evaluation project.

Given that many evaluators work under the constructs and timelines of grant-funded or contracted work, they may feel limited in their ability to influence how the people with lived experience can have continued involvement. However, evaluators can potentially use their role in developing work plans and budgets to explore making time and dedicating resources to setting up initial infrastructures for input that can be sustained beyond the project's time frame, while educating funders about what it takes to engage people with lived experience in a meaningful way.

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Initial Recommendations

- Spend time determining why you are incorporating people with lived experience into your evaluations. What is the goal, and what are the benefits to the evaluation and to those people? Let's not let it become another checkbox if lived experience truly has value.
- Develop an operational definition for lived experience. Your definition may not be perfect but start somewhere and refine your definition using a continual learning process.
- Do your homework to better understand the person with lived experience on the topic you are exploring. This will help you create a supportive, appropriate, and effective environment for their participation.
- Plan for and conduct intentional recruitment and outreach to people with the lived experience that is relevant to the work you are doing. Often the same individuals are engaged over and over, and there is a need to prevent burn out or exploitation among those people.
- Establish agreements for engaging people with lived experience that define processes, practices, and language to be used.
- Apply your evaluation skills to understand what works well and what does not. Interview the individuals who have been serving as "people with lived experience" to discover what they identify as challenges, facilitators, and opportunities related to the issues you are evaluating and related to their engagement in the design and implementation of the evaluation.

Moving from evaluation dominated by people who have no direct (and sometimes no indirect) experience of the topic they are studying to acknowledging that expertise lies among people who have great insight and knowledge because of their experience with the topic is undeniably a step in the right direction.

However, let's not be shy about looking at ourselves and reflecting on our own mental models, experiences, and personal and professional goals as we seek to make this shift.

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The Power of Purpose: Understanding what Motivates Community Partners' Participation in Evaluation and Research

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Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations to Engage in Research for Racial Equity

RTI's Transformative Research Unit for Equity's (TRUE) framework for equity-centered research and the Kellogg Foundation's recent practice guides describe how engaging communities is a core practice of doing evaluation in service of racial equity. However, when we engage communities, researchers and evaluators tend to reap the benefits without much forethought given to the mutual benefits that could advantage communities and/or partners. Historically, unethical practices in research that minimize attention to social justice and community benefits have also led to distrust from communities of color, largely affecting their willingness to engage in research. This then begs the question: why would communities want to engage with research and what motivates them to continue engaging?

Generally, there are two orientations to motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic.

- Intrinsic motivation: doing something for inherent satisfaction rather than a reward or consequence.
- Extrinsic motivation: doing something for the purpose of attaining some concrete outcome with instrumental value.

Both are equally important to consider when planning to engage community members in research because each one plays a role in driving behavior. If we want stronger engagements that can lead to partnerships with community members in the longer term, then we need to think about both types of motivations for incentives.

Our understanding of what motivates community members to engage with research leverages our practical experiences and empirical evidence based

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on community interviews asking what motivates participation. It's also grounded in our principle to work on developing mutually beneficial partnerships that balance knowledge generation with community priorities and tangible benefits. We share some of those community perspectives with examples that can guide evaluations in service of racial equity.

Intrinsic Motivations: "because I am passionate about health equity."

When we asked community members about their motivations to participate in research that was focused on health equity, many of them talked about a personal desire to serve that was fulfilling, especially if it meant advancing goals for equity and mitigating disparities in their community. For instance, community members in our research center were able to identify inconsistencies in the language that was used in our reports and in survey development. They were tired of hearing researchers talk about their community negatively. They advocated for asset-based language in our findings to challenge deficit-based narratives framed around their community. This shaped how we communicated about our research and informed how we engaged community members in co-designing products.

Thus, we have found that community members' motivations to engage in research that is in service of advancing equity can be an extended connection to their values and passion for social justice. Communities are thinking about what is possible if they engage in this work and the mutual benefits for the communities that they in turn are connected to.

Intrinsic motivations that promote meaningful engagement can also be embedded throughout the research process. For example, in a four-year long research project, our team prioritized building genuine relationships with community members. We made sure to open space to invite feedback about how we could work better together and what was needed to continue engaging community members in the work. Some of us were engaging with the community in other ways, like going to the farmer's market or supporting community classes through volunteering. We were successful because community members valued our overall practice to come to the table listening first and our shared commitment to serve. Our intrinsic values were in alignment.

Community members hear and experience our investment in the community, and as a result we develop deep, trusting relationships. If researchers and evaluators can demonstrate a dedication and intention to build relationships with community members beyond transactional interactions bound by a research project, then community members may feel more encouraged to participate and engage with them long term. This is because there is a mutual investment in time and effort to form trust-based relationships.

RTI's Equity Centered Framework principles for research practice require transformation of the researchers to engage inclusively by upending inherent biases and explicitly managing power dynamics so that at a minimum, the research or evaluation does no harm and ideally is strengthened by meaningful participation of community members. We believe that as researchers and evaluators, we can lead by example by seeking to develop respectful, mutually

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beneficial relationships with community members that reflect values of equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, transformation, and liberation. This is not always simple.

Reconsidering Extrinsic Motivations: "to help the community and in the long term help myself"

When researchers and evaluators think about extrinsic motivations, we oftentimes consider how community participation can be motivated by compensation. But, if we shift our lens toward valuing community engagement with mutual benefits, we find other options that can be mutually beneficial and enticing. For example, we have used incentives that prioritize capacity building through professional development training for community members to qualitatively code interview data in collaboration with our research team. Here, community members were equipped to provide qualitative interpretations based on their expertise to ensure meaningfulness of our findings. This eventually led to multiple publications with shared authorship and an award, contributing to their career development.

Practicing evaluation in service of racial equity encourages researchers to extend beyond monetary incentives to focus on other benefits such as building skills or increasing knowledge, receiving technical support, and/or career development opportunities.

Community members are also more motivated to participate in research if they believe that their engagement will lead to concrete outcomes. In our project focused on health equity, we found that community members were motivated by the opportunity to potentially gain access to resources like data management systems or evidence-informed instruments. Some were motivated to generate something in partnership that leveraged both forms of expertise (from the researcher and community member) because it helped foster an outcome that was more meaningful and responsive to communities.

In a different project focused on collaborative networks of nonprofits, we offered community members the option to donate their monetary incentives to a nonprofit organization of their choice in their community. This is another example of a concrete outcome that showed exactly where community members' contributions could go to motivate them to participate throughout the pandemic.

The common thread across all these experiences is that we made sure our incentives were meaningful and mutually beneficial for both the researchers/evaluators and community members to increase motivation to engage in our work. Researchers and evaluators should reconsider how extrinsic forms of incentives are designed and implemented.

We recommend shifting your focus to embed incentives to motivate community members that attend to values, mutual benefits, and capacity building for more meaningful participation of community members

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Doing Evaluations in Service of Racial Equity and Maintaining Relationships

As agents of social change, we must move our practices beyond the status quo. Meaningful engagement that focuses on trust and relationship building is key to community participation. But we also need to move away from the bounds of research to center equity. We need to focus on how the research or evaluation will not harm, but benefit communities. Our cost and benefit analyses when deciding to undertake a project should privilege community perspective if our work is to advance racial equity. How can we engage communities beyond grant funding and maintain those longer-term relationships? One consideration is to think about developing infrastructures that embed community participation as part of how systems normally function. For example, creating a community review board during the proposal phase to embed community members' input on language and design. This establishes a standardized infrastructure that requires community relationships throughout the proposal development process.



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Increasingly, government and private organizations that commission research are calling for greater inclusion of historically excluded and disadvantaged communities with the intent to make science more inclusive and to drive equity for all. While the idea of engaging communities in research has a long tradition in the social sciences, the view that engagement of community-based organizations (CBOs) and/or individuals with lived experience as critical to understanding the problem and identifying viable solutions is resonating more broadly. This makes sense as it makes for better research.

It remains difficult to do, even when there is a demonstrated commitment to be more inclusive in our research. Part of the reason why is because many of our own research organizations are not set up to build long term, trust-based partnerships with CBOs and other non-researchers with the intention to have them be active participants in the research process. In our practice we must navigate both technical and adaptive challenges as we seek to build long-term partnerships.

Moving Beyond Informing to Involve Communities in Collaboration

It is often the case that many organizations are used to informing or consulting communities when a decision has already been made as opposed to involving them from the beginning or checking to see if the new collaboration is of any interest. At times, we find ourselves searching for CBOs under time-constrained circumstances and with a list of requests. Conducting research in a way that advances equity requires that we rethink about who is involved in the research process as much as it is about the content of the research (e.g., focus on disparities). This involves holding a long-term view of what type of partnerships we and our organization need to cultivate to reach our desired impact. On a basic level, we want to avoid approaching new partnerships under the strains of transactional exchanges and instead move to create mutually beneficial partnerships.

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How might researchers navigate challenges?

There is not a single path to doing this well. But we have found that focusing on developing mutual respect for partners' expertise, priorities, and life circumstances goes a long way in building a foundation for long-lasting relationships.

Equitable Compensation for Collaborating Communities

The value we place in our community partners' engagement is reflected in how we compensate their contributions. Research that centers equity should incorporate compensation that is of value to communities, mutually beneficial, and designed keeping cultural context in mind. In our work we have done this by allocating funds for community compensation in grant proposals and having discussions with potential clients up front about the reality of the work that goes into community engagement processes that justifies compensation for community partners' time. This is a good practice in both research and evaluations. The Kellogg Foundations' recent practice guides for doing evaluation in service of racial equity offer concrete ways to think about deepening your community engagement. They emphasize the importance of being intentional in building this check point in our practice. When there is a solicitation that does not require a community engagement component, we still conduct our due diligence by asking the question if and where having community input may benefit the research process. There are times when we have explicitly built community engagement into a solution because it strengthens the approach. We are able to identify these opportunities because this is a concrete way to center equity in our research, by asking who else needs to be included and what points of view are privileged in the research. This goes for both qualitative and quantitative research.

We recommend that you do not wait for a solicitation to explicitly call for community engagement. Instead, build that assessment into your process so that this becomes part of how you work. Ultimately, this will resonate for some potential clients and not for others, but doing the assessment is a way to embed a concrete checkpoint for equity in your research process with the potential to strength your proposed solution.



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Technical operational barriers will start to come up in the granular, day-to-day details. For instance, during an evaluation of a local implementation of the WIC program, we secured community compensation options for our WIC participants. Usually, we would hand participants the physical gift cards in person, but organizational policies prohibited any in-person interaction. Our only option was to send gift cards via email. With input from our participants, we came to find that many do not have email addresses or feel comfortable sharing personal details to receive the gift card (like their home address). We had to work through this barrier in collaboration with our participants to find alternate ways to compensate. Our focus was on ensuring we had allocated resources to compensate participants, but not accounting for the form of delivery would have precluded some participants from receiving compensation. We eventually found an alternative to mail gift cards to a location of their choice. We also successfully advocated to revise the organizational policy to allow for mailing gift cards. In this evaluation, we were able to check our assumptions and change course because we had worked on building connections.

In other circumstances, organizations may have broader policies with their compensation models. For instance, we had the option to hire community navigators as part time employees for an evaluation with a county. We learned that our navigators shared hesitancy and strong concerns regarding the implications of becoming a government employee, even temporarily. Moving from honorariums to temporary contractors in our agency meant that they would lose the ability to freely advocate for their communities. While we initially assumed this would be received as a great opportunity, we later realized that a better strategy was to use the funds to increase honorariums. This was more aligned with the navigators' participation goals.

We recommend that you check in with your partners about what compensation would be meaningful to them to check your assumptions and find a solution that is mutually beneficial, faster.

(Un)expected Accommodations for Community Research

We have also faced technical challenges related to accommodations, including other costs for community participation such as travel time, transportation, and childcare. We know that organizations may not be able to provide high quality and timely accommodations even when there are financial resources available. For example, we supported a set of community partnerships as part of a place-based initiative focused on building community protective factors and improving local early care and education programs. The initiative sought to involve more parents in taking an active role in using their voice to inform state and county policymakers of barriers they face in their communities. Our colleagues worked diligently to support parents by hosting meetings after the 8-5 workday, providing childcare on site, and providing translation services for meetings when many of the parents did not speak English.

Even in this well-planned, well-resourced initiative we still were surprised. For instance, we planned a learning day where parents would travel to meet with state policymakers as part of a broader state effort focused on early care and education. We knew that getting parents to commit to travel would be challenging simply because many parents could not afford to take a day away from work (even a weekend) as many worked six or seven days a week. Parents who had young children had to either bring them along or make alternative

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childcare arrangements. Even still, we found parents who committed to attend. Then we moved to figuring out logistics, and it was here where we almost had to cancel the event. In the process of securing transportation, we found out that the organizational liability for staff travel did not extend to community partners participating in activities like the learning day. While seemingly a small detail, our colleagues in the contracts and business operations departments had to step in to figure out a solution or we would have to turn parents away in the next 36 hours. This was a critical decision point for the organizational leadership. Our leadership agreed to pay to temporarily extend the liability insurance to cover all participants. They took the risk because this work was part of a bigger shift for the organization to work more closely with communities. This experience served to teach us an additional layer of accommodations and problem solving that informed how we resourced accommodations.

A research practice that centers equity calls us to carefully consider the financial, ethnical, and logistical implications of the requests we make of any partners, with a particular focus on financial and time demands for community participation.

We recommend that in deciding how to do community engagement in your work, you limit non-reimbursed costs and if applicable, build in compensation for travel time into the budget. You should also consider if your organization should be the one to directly provide the accommodation and/or if perhaps there are existing CBOs that you can support by contracting with them to deliver the support.

The Future of Equity-Centered Research

It takes time to develop new policies and even more time to have the accompanying ways of working seep into the organizational culture. While organizational barriers come in all shapes and sizes, we encourage you to keep an eye on ways to make your research practice more inclusive by looking for opportunities to engage community knowledge, priorities, and perspectives. We should continue to be strategic in planning for accommodations and developing alternate strategies. With restrictions of current practices in place, we should look for opportunities to update organizational policies that no longer serve us and support practices that center equity and demonstrate respect for a wide variety of experts and expertise.