



Building the Field of Community Engagement is a collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. With funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Building the Field is bolstering the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraging other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. As part of the project, the partners produced a film, *Community at the Center*, which discusses the core principles and values of this important work, and they host the Engaged Learning Series, which are community conversations on critical community engagement topics. This report is part of a series of documents that offer community engagement tools created by the partners and further developed by participants at these events.

Building the Field partners:

Casa de Esperanza
Cultural Wellness Center
Hope Community
Lyndale Neighborhood Association
Native American Community Development Institute
Nexus Community Partners

ASSESS YOUR WORK: ESSENTIALS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a process that includes multiple techniques to promote the participation of residents in community life, especially those who are excluded and isolated, by engaging them in collective action to create a healthy community. It is a fluid and dynamic process with the power to impact multiple systems and to create lasting community change.

But what is authentic community engagement? Organizations work with community members in many different, valuable ways, but not all those ways are community engagement. As the Building the Field of Community Engagement partners attempt to better define the field and the work, they began to ask themselves, “How does an organization know if it is doing community engagement?”

At the second Engaged Learning Series event, *Assess Your Work: Essentials of Community Engagement*, the partners unveiled a new tool to help organizations, individuals and institutions determine whether their work was community engagement. The June 2014 event brought together 50 practitioners who worked with the assessment tool, provided critical insights and suggestions, and gave feedback on its value to the field. The latest version of the evolving tool can be found on page 2.

Participants at the event also heard Hope Community tell the story of their journey to becoming a community engagement organization. Their story illustrates the community engagement principles and processes outlined in the assessment tool and is an example of what is needed to be an organization dedicated to community engagement. Hope’s story begins on page 5.

This model is intended to provide organizations with a starting point for assessing whether their work is community engagement.

Q: WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DO YOU HAVE WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS?		
	OUTREACH	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships are primarily TRANSACTIONAL, for the purpose of completing a project. Relationships are often NOT INCLUSIVE of all racial or cultural groups in the community. Relationships can be LIMITED to a few community members, often giving influence to those with the loudest voices. Relationships are SHORT-TERM, so staff have to rebuild them as other projects or issues come up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships are FOUNDATIONAL, continually built between and among people and groups. Staff/institutions continually build the relationships they need to know their community. Relationships reflect the DIVERSITY within the community. Relationships are built not just with current leaders, but also with people with an interest and/or POTENTIAL TO BE LEADERS. Relationships are transformational and LONG-TERM, so community leaders/members can engage in projects and issues as they come up.
Q: WHY ARE YOU ENGAGING PEOPLE?		
	OUTREACH	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To accomplish a project or a SPECIFIC GOAL defined by the organization. To SEEK BUY-IN OR APPROVAL of something the organization has already planned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create space for people to CONNECT, RAISE CONCERNS, BUILD POWER and ACT IN THEIR OWN INTERESTS. To CREATE SPACE for the community's assets to be recognized and utilized.
Q: WHAT ARE YOU GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN? WHEN?		
	OUTREACH	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activities with community include FLYERING, SURVEYS, FOCUS GROUPS, WORKSHOPS, etc. Information is given or feedback is requested AFTER A PROJECT IS PLANNED. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activities with community include LISTENING SESSIONS, ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS, CELEBRATIONS, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY-BUILDING PROJECTS, etc. Planning is done WITH THE COMMUNITY from the beginning

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ASSESSMENT TOOL

Q: HOW DO IDEAS GET GENERATED?

	OUTREACH	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAFF/INSTITUTIONS GENERATE IDEAS they think the community will support. • Staff/institutions generate SOLUTIONS TO A PROBLEM they have defined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff/institutions SUPPORT COMMUNITY MEMBERS in generating their own ideas. • Staff/institutions engage in CONTINUAL SELF-REFLECTION to respond to and incorporate people's ideas, feedback, talents, and challenges into the work.

Q: DO YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND POLICIES SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT?

	OUTREACH	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organizational culture is primarily focused on OBTAINING SPECIFIC OUTCOMES. • Board and staff may NOT REPRESENT the community. • The organization ADHERES TO WAYS OF OPERATING that reflect the DOMINANT CULTURE, such as using Robert's Rules for meetings, prioritizing staff to speak, etc. • Racism and power may not be discussed or may be DEALT WITH SUPERFICIALLY. • The organization adheres to ORGANIZATION-DRIVEN policies and structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organizational culture is focused on learning and it values EMERGENT AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES. • Board and staff REFLECT the community. • The organization CREATES SPACE FOR DIFFERENT CULTURAL WAYS, such as offering cultural foods and social spaces/times, giving elders a special role, etc. • The organizational culture supports discussions to UNDERSTAND AND DISMANTLE structural racism, to help heal historical trauma and to claim individual and community power. • The organization demonstrates a willingness to revisit organizational policies and structures to RESPOND TO COMMUNITY NEEDS AND IDEAS.

Answers in the **LEFT-HAND COLUMN** describe work that is not community engagement. These may be outreach, organizing, volunteering, service learning, or data-gathering activities. It is important to note that these are valuable activities, but they are not what the Building the Field partners define as community engagement. Relationships in organizations that fit these descriptions are often transactional—they are built to accomplish a goal that is short-term in nature. Decisions are often made and ideas are often generated by the organization rather than the community. The organization's structure is frequently designed to further its mission rather than to reflect and engage the community.

Answers in the **RIGHT-HAND COLUMN**, on the other hand, describe an organization that is authentically engaging the community, building power in people to change their lives and their communities. In addition to being community-driven, these processes and activities are built upon solid relationships and have the goal of developing long-term leadership. These organizations' structures are designed to invite participation from the community and to build trust with community members. The engagement itself is considered an outcome (along with others) and it leads to better decision-making and a healthier community. As one Building the Field partner said, "It's far more than checking the community engagement box."



Left: NACDI President and CEO Jay Bad Heart Bull presented at the Engaged Learning Series. Right: Eva Song Margolis discussed the assessment tool with other community engagement practitioners.



Practitioners at the **Engaged Learning Series** event helped the Building the Field partners shape this model. They noted that the questions listed in the tool are important for organizations as well as for individuals to consider. “It’s about self-reflection and leadership,” said one participant. “It’s not about just being outward focused, but also about being inward focused.”

Another participant pointed out that the model presented at the event did not take into account the historical trauma experienced by communities of color. She recommended that the tool ask people and organizations to consider the hundreds of years of trauma that have shaped the history of our communities. “What does it mean for the agency and the staff to figure out how they are a part of that process?” she asked. Another participant noted that different communities have experienced different traumas, so the tool had to be flexible enough to be used by everyone.

The big challenge of this work, according to another practitioner, is figuring out whether or not you know your community. Many in the group agreed that community engagement organizations should regularly ask, “What does it mean to ‘know’ your community?” and, “Is there a point where you ‘know’ your community?” These are not questions that can be answered once, but rather are part of a continuous learning process.

“Community engagement is best when it’s not something you do, it’s your whole philosophy,” said one participant. “We’re talking about an entire organizational way of living.” Community engagement organizations support the power of people to improve their own lives and communities and commit to constant reflection and learning in the process. The questions in this model can help organizations that practice community engagement assess how consistently their work supports community engagement, and may help other organizations move their work in the direction of community engagement.

Hope Community
Director of Community
Engagement June Bouye
and Executive Direc-
tor Mary Keefe talked
about the organization's
transition to being a
community engagement
organization.



HOPE COMMUNITY'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

Hope Community is a Minneapolis-based organization that has intentionally committed to community engagement over the past 20 years. Hope was started in 1977 as a homeless shelter in the Phillips community of Minneapolis. When the crack cocaine epidemic hit in the late 1980s, large numbers of property owners and businesses abandoned the neighborhood. Nonprofits and public institutions did not know how to respond, and they mostly reacted to crises rather than focusing on systemic problems.

In response to the devastation, Hope developed a new mission to reclaim the neighborhood, working in partnership with the community. Over the last 20 years, Hope has transitioned to becoming a community development organization that has built or rehabilitated 173 units of affordable housing to date, while simultaneously building a unique approach to community engagement. As Hope developed this new approach, staff had to ask the same questions raised in the assessment model on page 2.

What kind of relationship do you have with community members?

Hope staff was very clear from the beginning that its emerging work would not be based in a social service model. Hope hired talented staff whose job was community engagement, and gave staff the freedom to work with community members to define the work.



Hope Community engages community leaders to build lasting power for positive change.



Why are you engaging people?

For many community developers, it is difficult to develop clarity about the purpose of engaging the community. Is it about getting input about physical development? Is it about solving problems for individuals? Or is it about challenging systems and structures that constrain the community? Hope committed to engaging the community to reclaim the Phillips neighborhood and to build lasting power for positive change.

How do ideas get generated?

Beginning in 1997, Hope began organizing listening sessions to create dialogues where people learn from and connect with each other. More than 3,000 people have participated over the past 16 years. The listening work is a pathway to power—community people facilitate and build their own skills, participants are heard, and everyone builds new relationships. Formal projects focused on specific topics are one way Hope uses listening. But listening is a daily, essential tool used in planning, reflection, one-to-one meetings and smaller gatherings in specific contexts.

What are you getting people involved in? When?

Hope created an environment with multiple opportunities called entry points, which allow people to engage around their interests. This was important because not everyone in the community wanted to be involved in the same way. Today, the organization offers multiple ways for youth and adults to build their leadership, and to be involved as much or as little as they want to be. Five hundred people participated last year alone.

Convening listening sessions is one way Hope has engaged community members and generated new ideas.



Do your organizational structures and policies support engagement?

Hope once had a traditional executive team, comprised of the director and department heads. The organization changed its structure to build a leadership team that was connected to the community. The resulting Action Team is comprised of the executive director, all four members of the community engagement team and the lead housing staff person. This team meets weekly to make important day-to-day decisions about the work, as well as to shape the long-term direction of the organization.

Executive Director Mary Keefe says that Hope's journey is not a how-to model, but rather is an opportunity to learn from an organization that has lived in the space of transitioning to becoming a community engagement organization. "What we have learned as we work through this transition is that the journey is never over. We will always be teaching ourselves," she said.

To join the Building the Field partners in learning more about this dynamic, challenging field, please watch the short film on community engagement, *Community at the Center*, and attend the next Engaged Learning event. Please visit <http://nexuscp.org/our-work/building-the-field-of-community-engagement/> for details. For more information, contact Janice Barbee at janicegwb@yahoo.com or Theresa Gardella at tgardella@nexuscp.org.





PARTNERS

CASA DE ESPERANZA is a national organization that puts community engagement at the strategic center of its local and national work to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. www.casadeesperanza.org

THE CULTURAL WELLNESS CENTER convenes and engages cultural communities to rediscover the power of culture and document this process for the redevelopment and healing of individuals, families and communities. www.ppcwc.org

HOPE COMMUNITY is a housing and community engagement organization that engages hundreds of diverse kids and adults each year to build stronger futures for themselves and their community through leadership, learning, organizing and community building. www.hope-community.org

LYNDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION is a diverse, community-driven organization that brings people together to work on common issues to ensure all community members live, work and play in a safe, vibrant and sustainable community. www.lyndale.org

THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE focuses on building a vibrant and thriving Native community through engagement, organizing and development work. www.nacdi.org

NEXUS COMMUNITY PARTNERS is a community building intermediary that supports initiatives and organizations advancing sustainable change by promoting community engagement and asset and wealth building. www.nexuscp.org

Please contact any of the organizations above if you'd like support developing or strengthening your community engagement work.