



2012 - 2024

BUILDING THE FIELD OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & NEXUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INSTITUTE

# Our Journey

This timeline cannot adequately capture or communicate the energy, the struggle, the learning, the challenges, the relationships, and the joy this work created, facilitated and held over 10+ years. Over the course of those years, Building the Field of Community Engagement (BTF) and Nexus Community Engagement Institute (NCEI) engaged with thousands of people from across the country deepening their learning of community engagement and creating community wherever they went. We are deeply grateful to all of you who helped build this work, supported this work, facilitated this work and by your participation, grew this work. A special thanks to our [Advisory Committee](#) Members, both past and present. This work would not have existed without you.



BUILDING THE FIELD PARTNERS

2008

## The Beginning

Nexus Community Partners began funding community engagement organizations in 2005, and over the years we were called by community to do more. In April of 2008, Nexus convened a group of elders from culturally based communities to begin a conversation around community engagement. We wanted to learn from them and with them, and to find ways we could bring more resources to this critical work. Building the Field of Community Engagement was born of these conversations.

## 2012-2016: Building the Field of Community Engagement

BUILDING THE FIELD  
PARTNERS CONTINUED

BTF was a four year collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. Six culturally and/or geographically-based organizations came together to bolster the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraged other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. The organizations included Nexus Community Partners, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, Cultural Wellness Center, Native American Community Development Institute, Hope Community, and Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza).



### 2012 Community at the Center

As part of the project, the partners produced a film, *Community at the Center*, a short film that discusses the core principles and values of community engagement.



### 2013 Community Engagement Forum

In Fall 2013, BTF partners planned what became an energetic Community Engagement Forum with over 100 practitioners, as well as funders and evaluators. People took on challenging questions around CE, told stories, built relationships, and demonstrated and celebrated core values.



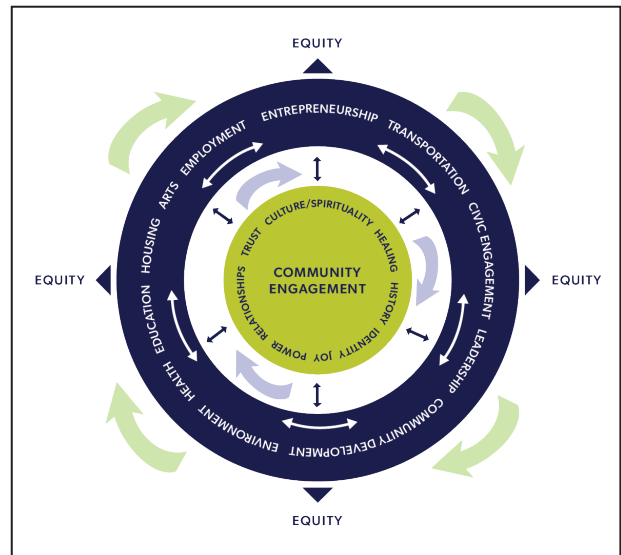
### 2014 Engaged Learning Series launches

Engaged Learning Series (ELS) were developed around topics important in the practice of CE. They were spaces where CE tools and resources were inspired, vetted and informed and where practitioners connected and learned from each other. Over the years, hundreds of people from foundations, community-based organizations, government agencies and institutions came together to learn and share knowledge.



## Impacts of Community Engagement Model

The [Impacts of CE Model](#) provided language to help practitioners and others articulate and identify the critical, but often less visible, components of community engagement. This tool remains a foundational resource for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of equity-centered community engagement.



2015

## Community Engagement Assessment Tool

The [Community Engagement Assessment Tool](#) was developed with community and helped grow our collective understanding of community engagement. The Tool helped users to be thoughtful about their own practice of engagement and to distinguish community engagement from community outreach.

## First Tapping the Potential of Community Engagement is held

Tapping the Potential of Community Engagement was an annual four-part workshop designed to introduce participants to the fundamental principles and practices of equity-centered community engagement. Over the years, hundreds of individuals deepened their learning, discovered new tools and found community through this experience.

## Stories of Impact launches

Each of the 6 organizations involved in BTF wrote Stories of Impact about their own CE work. These stories document the partners' and other practitioners' community engagement expertise and learning.

[Hope Community](#) • [NACDI](#) • [Esperanza United](#) • [Nexus Community Partners](#) • [Cultural Wellness Center](#) •



## 2016 - 2024: Nexus Community Engagement Institute (NCEI)

NCEI was the only community engagement institute in the country designed and informed by culturally-based community engagement practitioners. Building upon the foundation created by Building the Field of CE and the momentum it created in community, the partners decided to transition BTF into the Nexus Community Engagement Institute (NCEI). NCEI continued the work of BTF and continuously expanded its reach locally and nationally with more and more people engaged in more ways.

### 2016 **Everyone is an Evaluator**

This [document](#) explores the crucial role that evaluation plays in supporting and advancing the work of community engagement.

#### **Consulting Begins**

From 2016-2023, BTF and NCEI consulted with nearly 30 organizations and institutions, supporting more than 700 individuals in applying the community engagement tools and resources to their organizations or institutions. Organizations and institutions included Children’s Hospital, St. Paul Public Library, People Serving People, MN Department of Human Rights, Children’s Cancer Research fund, District Community Councils, MN Coalition for the Homeless, and many more.

[Engaging with Large Organizations](#) • [Community Advisory Councils](#)



### 2017 **Evaluation Fellows Program**

A partnership with the University of MN Evaluation Studies Institute to build the capacity of practitioners, funders and evaluators to learn about and assess the impact of community engagement.

### 2018 - 2022 **MacArthur Foundation**

In 2018, NCEI began a 4-year relationship with the MacArthur Foundation’s Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) to bring our community engagement work to a national level. The work was designed to help their grantees from across the country better integrate community engagement into their criminal justice reform work. The work built and strengthened the community engagement capacity within the institutions, systems, and communities that were a part of the SJC. A highlight of the work was a retreat NCEI held





for abolitionist organizations from across the country who came together to learn, heal, rest and to be joyful together.

2019

### Journey Mapping

Through an intensive and deeply engaged process, NCEI created a Journey Map that visioned their work out for the next 5-years. What emerged was a re-imagining of the work using the language Grow, Gather and Harvest. The new language more closely aligned with Nexus values of nourishing and cultivating relationships with community and one another, as well as acknowledging that the seeds we plant now can transform and nourish future generations.



2020

### Uprisings and a Pandemic

As for many others, 2020 brought transition, heartache, anger, deeper community love, and transformation into NCEI. NCEI adapted quickly and began offering their workshops and consulting virtually. It also catalyzed new ways of thinking and living into NCEI's mission, including an explicit, reinvigorated determination to restore power to communities, particularly those directly harmed by oppressive systems.

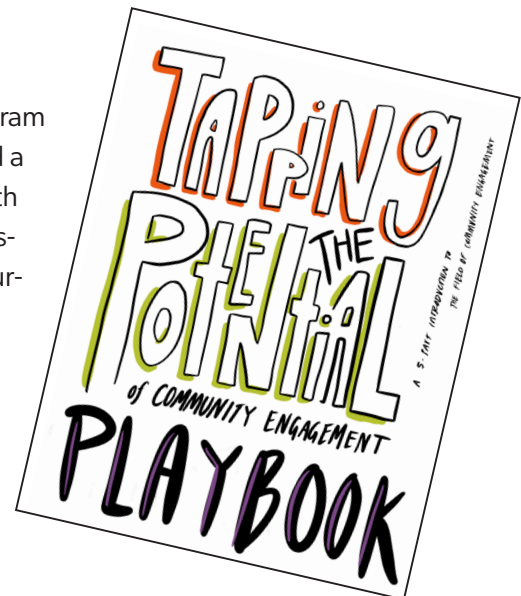
2021

### Neighborhood Leadership Program (NLP)

NLP is a 25-year-old community leadership program that was housed at Amherst H. Wilder and found a new home at Nexus and NCEI in 2021. A 7-month program, NLP provided a space for people to discover their leadership capacity and strengths, nurture the leadership of others, increase their own sense of purpose, and to practice values-based action in their community.

#### Tapping the Potential Playbook

This [creative outlet and workbook](#) was developed during the pandemic for deep guided reflection and practice to embody community engagement practices and principles.



2023

### Impacts of Community Engagement Model Video

As a way to further disseminate the Impacts of CE Model tool and its teachings, [NCEI created a video](#) to explain the Impact Model and to encourage people to use the tool in their own work.



### Dandelion Fund

The Dandelion Fund was a one-time initiative that dispersed small grants to BIPOC community members living in MN. Individuals would receive grants ranging from \$1,000-\$3,000 in the areas of Healing and Liberation, Decolonization or Joy.

2024

### Nexus Community Engagement Institute Sunsets

Community engagement is not new; it has been practiced throughout history among various cultures and communities. Building the Field of Community Engagement and Nexus Community Engagement Institute helped bring more attention and resources to the work and helped give the field clarity in its language and principles. However, community engagement is not a field that can rely on written materials alone; it takes a community of practitioners to support one another in practicing community engagement effectively, meeting its challenges, and tapping the strengths within each unique context. As always, we encourage you to seek out experienced practitioners to support you in implementing community engagement, along with any of the tools, principles, and concepts we have shared.



If you have any questions about the history, impact or learnings from Building the Field of Community Engagement or Nexus Community Engagement Institute, please reach out to Theresa Gardella at [tgardella@nexuscp.org](mailto:tgardella@nexuscp.org). If you'd like to share a story or experience of BTF, NCEI, or any of our tools, [click here and let us know!](#)

