

## Group Health Foundation Lessons Learned Presentation Instructions

### Lessons Learned from Community Engagement Presentation Instructions

Thank you for offering to share your perspectives with us. We are looking forward to learning from you. We want to provide you with direction and context for your paper (or other preferred type of presentation) so that your time is well spent. We are particularly interested in hearing about your process — the ways you have invited, engaged, and created paths for community members to identify the issues that matter most to them. We hope you will share a reflective presentation about challenges, successes, and key learnings related to the process of engaging and partnering with communities on health equity issues.

Your insights will help inform and shape Group Health Foundation's long-term strategy. Learning from you about the best ways to support place- and identity-based communities in their journey to find equitable solutions will enable us to do the same. We intend to share all submissions through our website (with your permission) so that others can benefit from your expertise as well.

With that in mind, here are our requests and expectations for your paper/presentation:

- Please limit your paper to six pages, including all attachments and appendices.
- Please limit the description of your organization, mission, and program(s) to one or two paragraphs.
- Please address the following questions:

#### **1. How have you engaged, convened, and maintained relationships with your community/communities?**

It is the mission of the Thurston Asset Building Coalition (TABC) to connect partners and community resources to promote opportunities for people with limited incomes to become more resilient and prosperous. We envision a Thurston County wherein all individuals and families are able to live, work, meet basic needs, and prosper.

As a coalition of social service providers, healthcare agencies, community and economic developers, educators, workforce developers, faith communities, financial institutions, businesses, government agencies, other coalitions, and individuals, it is our work to engage these leaders in building alliances across sectors through the convening of four community hubs. We further support these collectives through learning forums and events, community advocacy and the promotion of services that support those struggling through poverty.

Because we define asset building as the supports and programs that stabilize and broaden individual's resources, our work focuses on four vital areas: Health, Food Security, Housing and Economic Advancement, for individuals and families with limited incomes.

We maintain our relationships with our communities primarily through the convening of the following four hubs: Safety Net Council of Thurston County (Health Hub), Homeless Housing Hub (Housing Hub), South Sound Food Systems Network (Food Security Hub) and the TABC Economic Advancement Hub (Economic Hub). In addition to these four hubs, we are in the process of developing and growing a fifth hub focused on community advocacy, the Community Impact Network.

Our four hubs meet either monthly or every other month and the TABC convenes and or provides leadership for each of the hubs. We further support these hubs through the production and support of collaborative learning events including:

- Innovations in Bridging Health and Housing Forum - Winter 2017
- Food Summit 2018 - Fall 2017
- Paid Sick Leave Law Luncheon - Winter 2018
- Behavioral Health Forum - Scheduled for Summer 2018

The fifth hub, the Community Impact Network is a new initiative designed to further our cross-sector work through the development of a network that organizes to promote a grassroots community impact agenda. We especially seeks to engage and support the voices of those often not heard or encouraged to speak out.

To that end, we are using the strategy of building a “counter storytelling community” consisting of partners, low income participants, and others, to challenge dominant narratives about living in poverty (i.e. causes/solutions). We envision that by sharing new stories that are grounded in a larger historic context and told through the lived experience and knowledge of those most impacted, that we can create a powerful vehicle for helping the community understand the struggles and the vision of folks living in poverty.

We aim to not only engage folks in storytelling but provide an avenue through “Conversation Sessions” to discover common issues across community sectors that matter the most. In addition, our goal is to build the Community Impact Network (CIN) out of emerging leaders, which will convene to agree and advocate on a select number of issues.

We are currently in Phase One of the CIN project, which involves, among other things, the convening of the Conversation Sessions. Working closely with the partner organizations to support these sessions through stipends, food provisions, guidelines and other facilitation support, the sessions will commence this summer and be held throughout the year.

## **2. How have you co-designed or co-created solutions with your community/communities?**

Currently, there is no vehicle to pro-actively bring together local diverse voices and groups around a common agenda to improve conditions and opportunities for our most vulnerable community members. The TABC convened a focus group of community leaders to decide if a community advocacy network was a true local need and if so what would be the best way to proceed in its’ development.

Through this focus group and subsequent CIN meetings, grass-roots participation was deemed vital. This further led us to the use of the Community Conversations model - coupling with partner organizations to engage and begin to cultivate local emerging leaders.

## **3. How have you addressed systemic inequities that affect health (such as power differentials or racism) as part of your community engagement work?**

Power imbalance is often hidden in the very systems and structures that we work with. By focusing directly on addressing the issue of imbalance and how to infuse equity into both the

process and the outcomes we were able to come up with objectives and later develop a system that would work with the ideals of equity in mind.

Here are some of the key ingredients that we have developed to use at the Conversation Sessions to ensure greater connection and balance for the project:

- Partner with community organizations
- Engage a Participant Lead from each organization to lead out in the Conversations
- Hold the Conversations at a “safe harbor”, probably the partner organization’s site to allow folks to share in a safe environment
- Include the voices of the people being served by inviting them to the leadership table
- Support the invited communities in their ability to participate by being sensitive to different needs, including providing:
  - Stipends to the Participating Lead
  - Daycare during the event (when funds are available)
  - Reasonable hours that suit the client for the event (evenings or weekends)
  - Leadership development and support
  - Lunch

**4. What about your organization’s way of working has made you successful? How has your organizational culture or structure changed to allow for authentic community relationships? Include examples of how your staff and your board (if relevant) contributed to the culture and values that enabled your success.**

The opportunity of finding shared values, interests and goals in our community is one of the many valuable aspects of a coalition. We then are able to combine our resources and become more effective in the community we serve. The Thurston Asset Building Coalition developed the four hubs mentioned above to successfully engage diverse communities and address emerging issues and innovative practices.

The TABC brings to these hubs participation from our, all volunteer, Steering Committee (TABC board), which provide support by contributing their leadership as Chairs, Co-Chairs, Secretary or other form of hub committee influence.

In addition to the “outside” work being done through the hubs, within our own Steering Committee, this year at our annual retreat, the TABC adopted a new strategy that takes into account equity, inclusion and diversity. It is our goal to “Shape a Culture of Equity and Parity” for the TABC that includes:

- Incorporate tools and strategies to build awareness to ensure our structures support equity and parity
- *Intercultural Development Inventory* or other related equity education for Steering Committee members and staff
- The shaping of clearly articulated values in regards to equity to guide all of TABC’s work moving forward.
- Active recruitment of diversity within the Steering Committee

**5. What have been your most significant challenges, obstacles, and missteps? We know that we can learn as much from setbacks as we can from successes, so please don’t**

**hold back!** (If you are concerned about sharing challenges publicly, just let us know and we will omit your response to this question from the version we share publicly.)

Our community development experience has shown us that connecting with established community partners and in turn using the model of reaching out to folks within their own trusted communities, whether that is a nonprofit social service organization, a faith-based group or any other established community entity, opens the door to reach folks that would normally not come to an invitation event that is outside of their “comfort zone”.

This model, of meeting folks at their place of power, begins to bridge the trust issue for a deeper dive into that community and gives us the opportunity to offer something of value by way of education, inspiration, tools or just plain community engagement and good faith.

By offering these things as guests and with respect, we acknowledge the value they already have and hope, in turn, that they might see in us the value that we wish to develop by working together!

## **6. What changes have you seen that give you hope about a future that is more equitable?**

The work of the TABC, in bridging sectors that support low income individuals and families, brings with it a unique perspective into our community. The diversity of organizations and individuals that are members of one or more of our four hubs, as well as the Community Impact Network, allows an opportunity for broad yet open and safe conversation about innovations emerging community issues, and now, in particular, the issue of equity and inclusion and the systems that might contribute to these inequities.

In many ways we see hope through the myriad, even though sometimes small yet potent, changes that are taking place in our communities and at the TABC. Looking more broadly, it is clear that the issues surrounding inequities have become more prevalent. But what we have seen within our own organizational culture as well as within the hubs that we convene and the alliances that we have forged with equity in mind, is what gives us the most hope.

We have seen...

- An openness, humility and vulnerability in individuals and community leaders who have been willing to say “I really don’t know what this is all about but am willing and would like to learn more”.
- The Chairs of our hubs directly addressing equity in hub meetings and bringing forth practices to address inequities at our forum and events.
- Top down changes, such as the addition of an “equity” strategy being developed by the TABC Steering Committee to address first the practices within the Steering Committee that can educate and broaden the values of equity, inclusion and diversity.
- Facilitated conversations addressing the impact on individuals regardless of intention and people willing to take responsibility for their actions.
- Stronger alliances with organizations strongly focused on equity and parity.
- Staff meetings, which discuss equity, inclusion, parity and diversity.
- Councilman and Councilman attending our cross sector, diverse community hub meetings.
- A strong willingness to participate in the emerging grassroots Community Impact Network.

Please feel free to answer the questions in the order that they are listed above or present your narrative in a different way that works better for you. If you prefer to use graphics or another format besides narrative to address these questions, we are open and interested.

Please contact us at [info@grouphealthfoundation.org](mailto:info@grouphealthfoundation.org) if you have any questions. We trust your experience and expertise and are open to your creativity and honesty. Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to learn alongside you.

Please submit your presentation to [info@grouphealthfoundation.org](mailto:info@grouphealthfoundation.org) by June 29, 2018