



# COMMUNITY VOICE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

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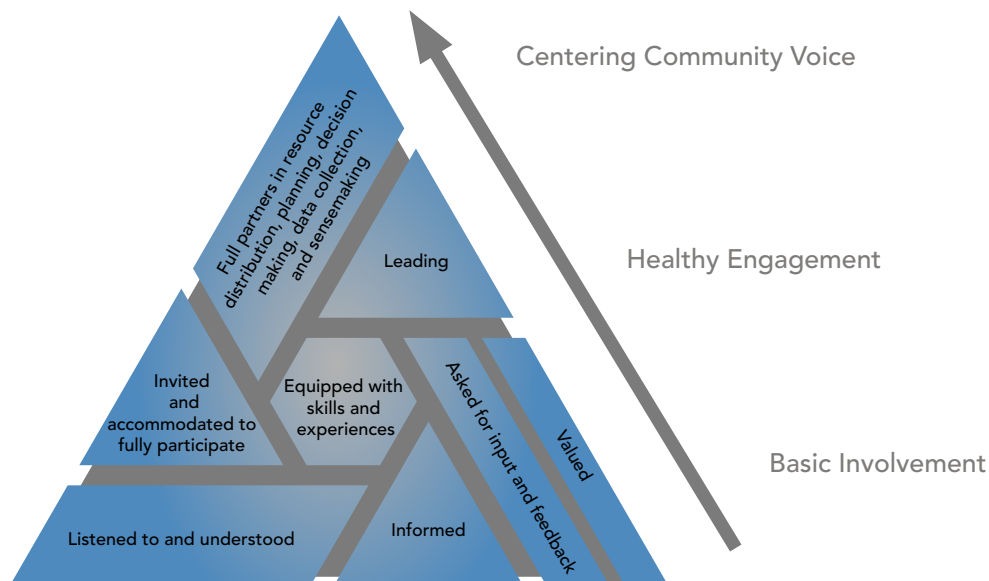
Centering community voice is an approach to leverage the wisdom from those with lived experience to meet the goals and needs of people in communities. This approach places the perspectives, opinions, and priorities of residents at the heart of community health system transformation with the goal of achieving equitable health outcomes. These tools were developed based on a comprehensive review of literature on what constitutes meaningful community voice,<sup>1</sup> 25-plus years of the Georgia Health Policy Center's on-the-ground experience, and conversations with people with lived experience and experts in the field.

Research on health collaboratives — based on perspectives of practitioners and those with lived experience — offer mixed guidance on what constitutes meaningful community voice, which strategies are most effective for sustainably engaging community residents, and how to best measure success in incorporating community voice in health-oriented cross-sector collaborations.<sup>1</sup> However, there are themes that can be helpful to community collaboratives, organizations, funders, and researchers.

Real-world practice shows that strategies to engage community in health transformation efforts fall on a spectrum between passive and active approaches. The movement from passive to active approaches requires more up-front time and resources from community members and the organizations or collaboratives that are engaging with them. However, with the additional time and resources there are higher levels of perceived and actual power of communities relative to organizational partners.

By better understanding the spectrum of community engagement and the principles that support increased active community voice, practitioners, funders, and researchers can develop resources and understand the pathways to collaboration that enhance community well-being.

Throughout the spectrum of community engagement, residents are...



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# PRINCIPLES OF CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE



## Leadership

Communities transform when the leadership of its residents is revealed, cultivated, and engaged.

- Honor the leadership and influence dynamics of the community.
- Invite residents to participate and prepare and equip them to participate successfully.
- Recognize the long-lasting value and generational benefits of investment in human capital in a community.
- Reinforce the value of a lived-experience perspective in leadership activities, including in planning and decision-making.



## Mindset

Centering community voice is foundational to community health system transformation.

- The history of a community and the lived experience of its residents matters.
- Residents understand the challenges and aspirations of their community better than anyone.
- Residents are capable of full participation and leadership when given the opportunity and equipped with skills and experiences.
- Humility is essential. The ideas, interests, and insights of system leaders, funders, and other experts are valuable but should not be centered in transformation efforts.
- Centering community voice is not a one-time activity, but an ongoing commitment and learning experience.



## Trust

Building trust with community residents is a prerequisite to healthy engagement and centering community voice.

- Trust starts with a lot of listening and builds as understanding of the community and its residents deepens.
- Residents often suffer from experiences of broken trust that must be acknowledged and addressed to move forward.
- Trust is fragile. Speak the truth, don't overpromise, and acknowledge your mistakes.
- Be prepared to commit and stay in relationships for the long-term or don't engage at all.



## Shared Power

Centering community voices requires a shared belief that residents should be full partners in leading transformation efforts.

- Equity can be achieved only when residents share power.
- Centering community voice ultimately impacts:
  - Where the money goes
  - Who defines success
  - Who speaks for the community

Looking for more information on assessing how well your collaborative is incorporating community voice? Check out [these grounding questions](#) and [TEAM](#), the Toolkit for Everyone Aligning and Measuring.

<sup>1</sup>Petiwala, A., Lanford, D., Landers, G., & Minyard, K. (2021). Community voice in cross-sector alignment: Concepts and strategies from a scoping review of the health collaboration literature. *BMC Public Health*, 21(712). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10741-9>