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THINKFORWARD STRATEGIES



Equity-Centered Community Engagement by Public Health Departments Lessons from the Field

March 12, 2024

Poll

Where are you when it comes to equity-centered community engagement practices?





Agenda

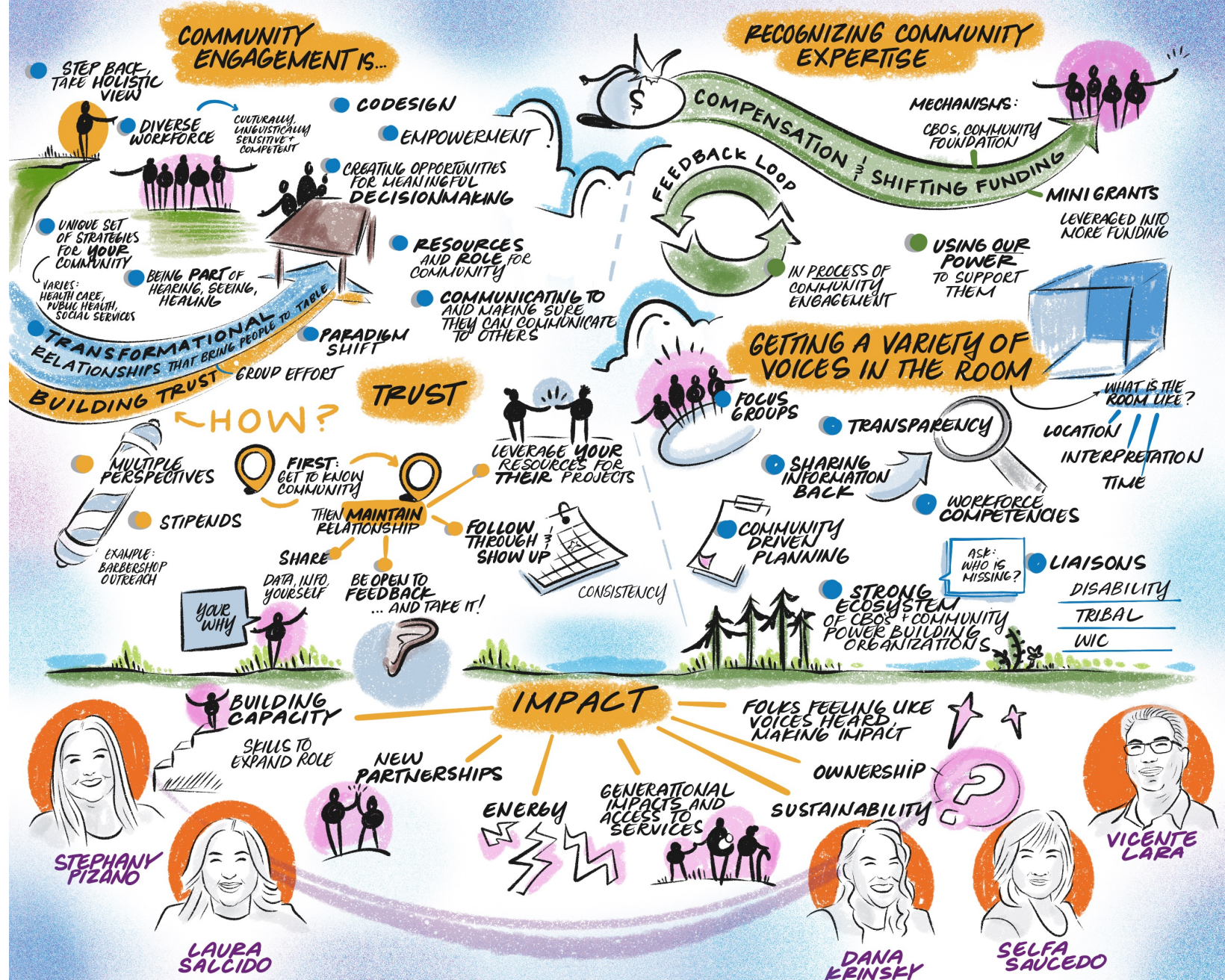
- Welcome from CDPH & BSCF
- Sharing our research
- Fabulous LHJ panel
- Closing remarks from CDPH

Dr. Rohan Radhakrishna

**Deputy Director, Chief Equity Officer,
and Tribal Liaison**



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PANEL



Domain 2: Collaborative Partnerships

Competency A: Structures to Build Collaboration

Competency B: Community Based Organization & Resident Engagement

Competency C: Partner Across Sectors

equity-centered community engagement by public health departments: lessons from the field

Karen Ben-Moshe

Policy Program Officer

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March 12, 2024

our mission

Blue Shield of California Foundation supports lasting and equitable solutions to make California the healthiest state and end domestic violence.



Aligning systems with community priorities

Communities understand their needs and strengths best. Ensuring those communities have more say in which issues get addressed is the best way to build lasting, more equitable solutions to health disparities and domestic violence.



moving towards equity-centered community engagement



- Current engagement falls short in meeting the needs of groups who are systematically denied access to power and resources.
- We wanted to look inside public agencies at a practical level to find enabling and impeding factors.

Our research





Research questions

- What is the **current state of engagement** by public agencies in California?
- How can public agencies be **more effective at practicing equity-centered engagement**?
- How do we **measure and define effective, equity-centered engagement**?



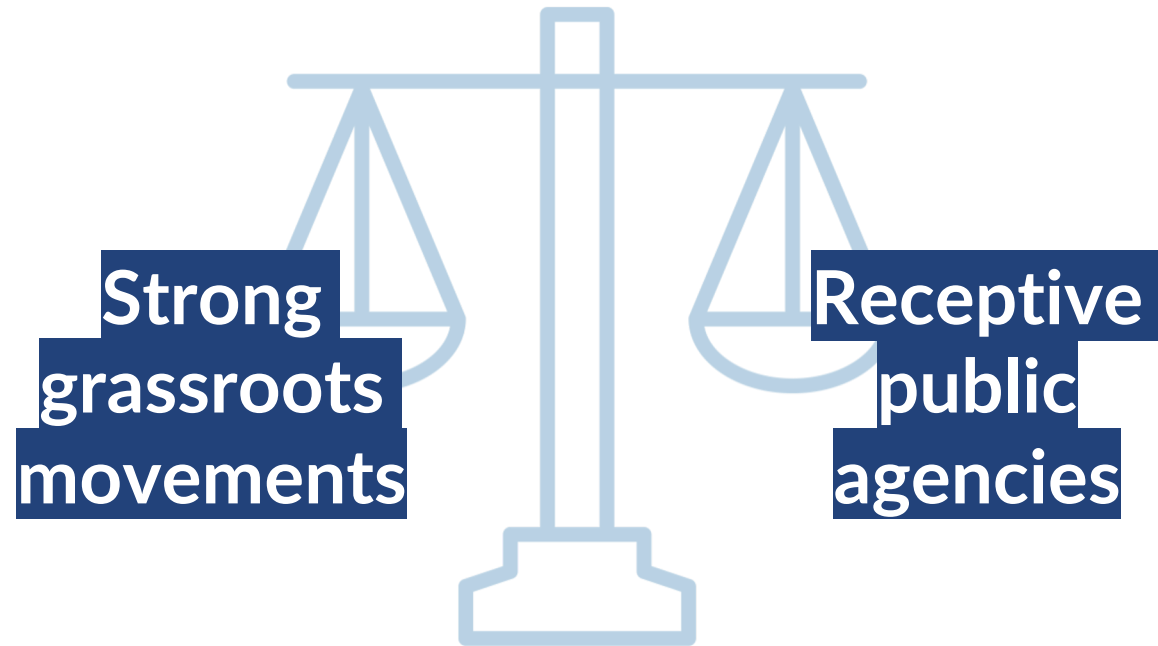


Research process

- Focused on two agencies under increased pressure to transform engagement: **public health** and **education**
- Completed a **legal scan**, reviewed **key literature** and philanthropic trends, **interviewed** scholars and practitioners

Why focus on government?

- Local civic engagement → crucial path toward rebalancing power in our democracy.



- Investment in grassroots movements will be most successful alongside **deliberate efforts to support public agencies in engaging with the communities they serve.**



What does equity-centered engagement look like?

- Ongoing, not one-off
- Focused on developing strong relationships (not transactional)
- Intentional about whose feedback is being sought
- Hosted in non-traditional settings
- Provides something of value to participants
- Incorporates arts and culture
- Moves away from consultation and towards power-sharing (see the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#))

Enabling factors for community engagement by government*

Supportive leadership, agency culture, mindsets



- Expectation that agency success is dependent on engagement
- Value community members as experts on their needs and solutions
- Intentionally inclusive, especially around race and culture
- Prioritize necessary time and resources
- Model power sharing in decisionmaking

Systems and structures designed for equity-centered engagement

- Explicitly named in agency goals and objectives, job requirements, and performance metrics
- Public contracting regulations, labor union agreements, and other procedural rules support innovation and nimbleness
- Agency staff have access to training and professional development

There's a better way: public agencies centering equity in community engagement

"There are a lot of different forms of leadership in our community that sometimes, as a public agency, we may not necessarily recognize. Part of the work that we're doing is to elevate those voices, add more chairs to the decision-making table. We can have more meaningful conversations, meaningful decision-making processes, and develop solutions and strategies that are based on the lived experience of the folks that we're trying to serve."

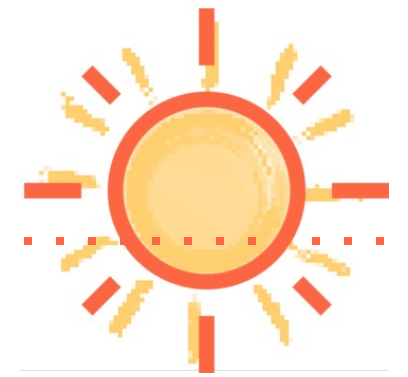
- Vicente Lara, Monterey County Health Department

Genuine, local-level engagement between public agencies and the communities they serve is crucial to meeting the needs and priorities of people experiencing health inequities, particularly communities of color and low-income people. Many root causes of health inequities are shaped by decisions made and implemented by local government, from opportunities to access safe, stable and quality housing, to education, transportation, and employment. As research affirms the role of community power in achieving health, it's clear that the health of communities is closely linked to their ability to influence the decisions of local government.^{1,2}

We know that current engagement approaches fall short and do not always uncover the needs and priorities of groups who are systematically denied access to power and resources. Communities of color and low-income people are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, resulting in profound consequences. Without intentionally adopting engagement approaches that aim to shift power, public agencies will continue to perpetuate and exacerbate existing inequities.

Moving towards equity-centered community engagement requires a paradigm shift. It involves deep investment in both sides of the engagement equation: strong grassroots coalitions that represent diverse people and interests, and government bodies that listen to and work with those coalitions.³ Recently, we have seen substantial energy and resources flowing to the first side of the equation: building grassroots power to influence policy and public decision-making. But will grassroots organizing produce meaningful change if the government is not responsive and receptive to it?^{4,5}

Bright Spots



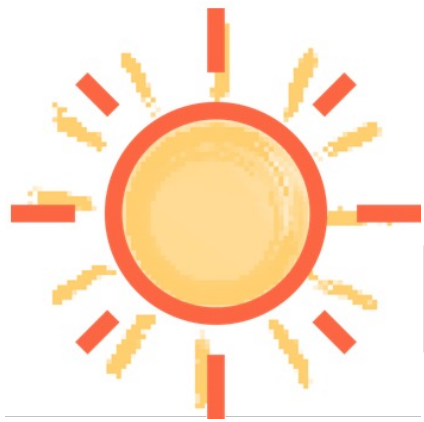
- Providing training and professional development to all staff (Monterey County LHJ)
- Funding engagement through general funds rather than special grants or temporary funding streams (Shasta County LHJ)
- Prioritizing marginalized students and families for outreach and meeting them where they are (San Juan USD)
- Dedicating an office to community engagement (Cajon Valley USD)



Questions?

Antoinette Manuel
Community Engagement Specialist,
Community Inclusion and
Partnerships Unit





Equity-centered engagement bright spots panel

**El Dorado
County**

Cathy Larsen

**Inyo
County**

Griselda Ortiz

**Napa
County**

**Erin
Nieuwenhuijs**

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Thank you!