Authentic Stakeholder Engagement

CT Balance of State Continuum of Care

October 1, 2021

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Agenda

1. Welcome & Introductions

2. Why Authentic Stakeholder Engagement?

3. Concepts that Support Meaningful Participation and Partnership

4. Common Barriers to Authentic Engagement

5. Group Discussion – Setting Shared Goals for Change

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Objectives

Following today's session, participants will be able to:

- Define concepts and elements used in defining authentic partnership

- Identify common challenges and barriers to authentic partnership

- Identify initial strategies Connecticut Balance of State (BoS) Steering Committee members may consider adopting to deepen partnerships

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Group Agreements

- Be present and listen actively
- Choose courage over comfort
- Participate to the fullest of your ability
- Take space, make space
- Assume good intent, but also acknowledge impact
- Challenge ideas, not people
- Use "I" statements
- Recognize emotional tax, extra labor, and burden that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and people with lived experience face in some conversations
- Anything else?

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Introductions

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Introductions

- Name and Pronouns

- Think about the different relationships in your life (family, friends, romantic, work, etc.). What is one aspect of a strong partnership that you value?

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Why Authentic Stakeholder Engagement

Background and Context for our Conversation

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Where did we start?

- Continuums of Care (CoCs) were mandated to include at least one "homeless or formerly homeless person" on CoC boards, and many started with a practice of setting aside one seat.

- Many challenges come up when one, or only a few, people are representing a broad group.

- Risk of tokenism and lack of decision-making power

- Treating people experiencing homelessness as a monolithic group; lack of representation on diverse experiences of homelessness: BIPOC, LGBTQ+, age, disability, DV survivors and other identities and areas of experience

- Background context on CT BoS CoC and this work

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Where are we going?

- Communities/CoCs are increasingly aware that the level of engagement of people with lived experience has been insufficient.

- People most impacted by decisions have a right to be included in decision-making

- Increased representation and meaningful participation of people with lived experience and expertise means better, more well-informed solutions

- HUD is beginning to incentivize and increased focus on the inclusion of people with lived experience

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Meaningful Participation & Partnership

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Important Concepts

DI·VER·SI·TY

All the ways in which people differ.

EQ·UI·TY

Fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people. One's identity cannot predict the outcome.

IN·CLU·SION

A variety of people have power, a voice, and decision-making authority.

Inclusion

- Genuine

- Engaging

- Validating

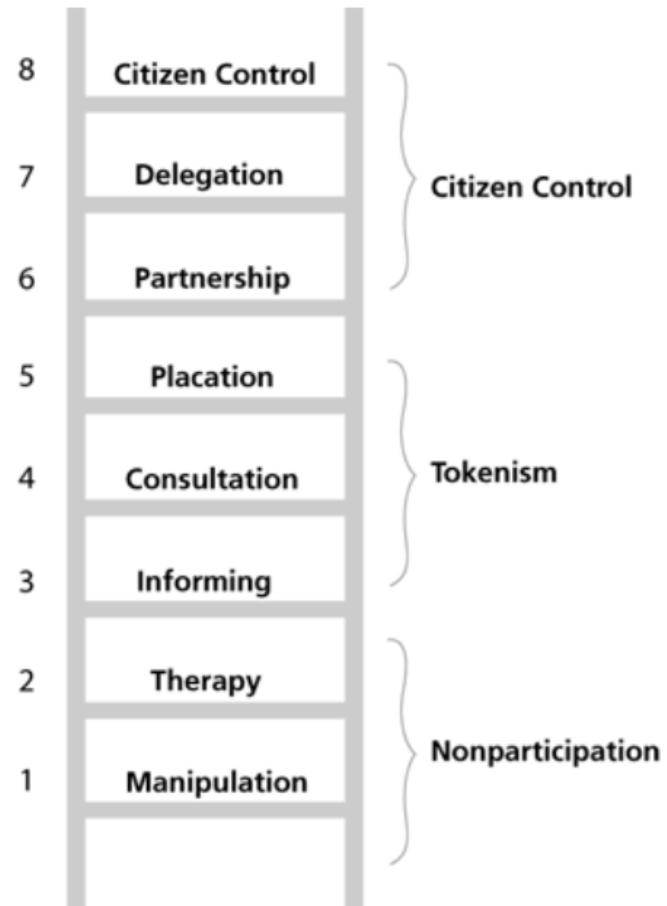- Participation

- Collaboration

Lived Expertise

Participatory Decision-Making

- Involvement
- Stakeholder
- Partnership
- Respect

Source: Arnstein, S. (1969) 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35.4: 216–224

Barriers to Authentic Engagement

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Barriers to Authentic Engagement

- Gatekeeping: Unnecessarily restricting access to information, resources, and decision-making.
    - Leadership teams and boards that aren't representative and exclude others from the tables where decisions are made.
    - Putting off included others because the timing isn't right, you think they won't have enough background or interest in the topic, etc.

- White dominant culture norms: Attitudes and practices based in white cultural traditions that shape much of our work
    - Valuing titles and agency affiliations over other types or representation and expertise
    - Urgency overrides inclusive practices
    - Valuing control over transparency and vulnerability

- Tokenism: Performative or decorative changes that don't represent true shifts in power.
    - Inviting only one or a few people to represent a large, diverse group
    - Inviting people to give feedback or participate without giving them any real decision-making power
    - Inviting people to only participate in one aspect of the system
    - Inviting people only to share their personal stories

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Barriers to Authentic Engagement

- Barriers that show up in meeting spaces:
  - Using lots or jargon and technical language
  - Introductions that only include titles and agency affiliations
  - Lack of dedicated resources to facilitate participation (fair compensation, access to technology, insufficient accommodations, etc.)
  - Meeting structures that aren't conducive to participation (rigid agendas, Robert's Rules, timing and location of meetings, etc.)
  - Relying on limited networks for recruitment
  - Insufficient investment in training and resources for all participants

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Group Discussion

Setting Shared Goals for Change

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Group Discussion

In breakout groups, you'll have about 10 minutes to discuss:

What are 3 or more specific action steps that could be taken by an individual, agency, or the full CoC to create more authentic partnerships?

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THANK YOU!

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