

Case Study of the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership in Contra Costa County: The City of Richmond’s Workshop and Resident Ambassadors of the Race Equity Team

In October 2020, the City of Richmond’s Race Equity Team (also known as the GARE team) and Healthy Contra Costa (formerly known as Healthy Richmond) hosted a half-day virtual workshop facilitated by Rosa Gonzalez of Facilitating Power, who developed the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership in partnership with multiple communities advancing racial equity through centering resident voice and power. The purpose of the workshop was to create a space for collaborative learning and capacity building to promote equitable community engagement and fair outcomes for all Richmond residents by centering on historically marginalized groups impacted by structural racism. There were over 60 participants of diverse stakeholder types and they represented community-based organizations, different departments of City of Richmond, Contra Costa Health Services, West Contra Costa Unified School District, and resident leaders.

Based on the workshop, the general community highlighted many ***barriers to authentic participation*** due to **limiting practices, beliefs/bias/racism, information & training, language, technology & transportation, political power, and the dominant economic paradigm.**

Despite these challenges, in order to overcome the identified barriers and improve the cultural practices and change/build institutions or systems, the community also brainstormed ***ideas, actions, & next steps***. Their recommendations included themes related to **cultivation of equitable housing opportunities, enhancement of the community equity profile, assessment and improvement of diversity in Boards & Commissions, utilization of a racial equity tool to determine local budgets, application of a racial equity lens to improve hiring and human resources practices, development of a framework for equitable community engagement, and establishment of practices for equitable policy development & racial equity departments in each major jurisdiction.**

In particular, as part of the ideas under “establishment of practices for equitable policy development & racial equity departments in each major jurisdiction”, one of the statements highlight the need to “Build on the Y-PLAN model, we have a relationship with students, it will create agency in their school, education, etc. Don’t wait for students to engage because it will translate beyond their schools.” In another idea under “development of a framework for equitable community engagement”, it highlights the need to have “programs that facilitate pathways to decision making” and to have “Capacity training and compensation for time and voice. And acknowledge their work. Give residents credit.” Recently, the City of Richmond has laid out the foundations to start building on these recommendations through allowing residents to engage and take action at their monthly Race Equity Team meetings.

In August 2021, in order to pipeline and train Y-PLAN and Literacy for Every Adult Program (LEAP) alumni into the City of Richmond’s (CoR) Race Equity Team Resident Ambassador

Program, Healthy Contra Costa and LEAP launched the Y-PLAN Bridge Program, a 1 week training series with 1.5 hour daily sessions. During these sessions, facilitators shared practical tools and conceptual knowledge to help participants understand how their positions as resident ambassadors and visions of equity in its all forms (health, racial, housing, etc.) are associated with institutional/systems change, the political landscape, policy advocacy, and community power.

After completion of the program, in September 2021, resident ambassadors were able to finally join the monthly City Race Equity Team meetings. Resident Ambassadors, Healthy Contra Costa, and partners from LEAP (Literacy Program Manager who worked closely with the resident ambassadors during their participation in LEAP and the Y-PLAN Adult Projects) and Advance Peace (a former staff member of the City of Richmond and devoted Race Equity Team member) were learning and engaging in discussions related to the City of Richmond's Race Equity Action Plan (REAP). To summarize, the REAP is focused on fixing or telling the city how to fix their practices and processes in a way that benefits the community in an actionable and equitable way. It is a guide or instrument in order to promote and embrace race and equity in all its forms. There are 4 goals to the REAP and each goal has a set of community indicators, outcomes/actions, timeline, accountability, performance measures, progress, participant priority ratings, and council values.

In order to influence this plan, resident ambassadors have been frequently meeting with Healthy Contra Costa and their Economic Justice Action Team partners to receive support, guidance, and strategize on improving practices related to community engagement so that the Richmond community is aware that resident ambassadors and the Race Equity Team exists and that resident voices should be embedded in the plan. An idea from the group was to host monthly virtual community buzz cafes on race equity, starting in January 2022, where the team of resident ambassadors and partners plan and facilitate discussions with community members by unpacking the goals and their respective actions. Based on what was heard from the community, the team will synthesize the responses from the cafes and create recommendations to inform the REAP and overall policies and practices of the local jurisdiction system.

In addition to influencing the REAP, the resident ambassadors have built individual and collective power. Through speaking their truths and having serious acknowledgement from city staff with their new positions as resident ambassadors, they have been able to expand their sphere of influences and connections to those who can advance the resident's previous advocacy and equity efforts in areas of interest they are passionate about. In particular, resident ambassadors also participated in research and accountability meetings with the City of Richmond's Planning Division staff who hold a major level of responsibility in integrating the recommendations (intended to improve resources and resources, meaningful community engagement, cleanliness, communication, safety, community spaces, 'rent-to-own' programs, etc.) from the [Final Policy Brief Y-PLAN Adult Project for the Nystrom Village Housing Project 2019](#) into the Request for Proposals of the future Nystrom redevelopment. Resident ambassadors have also been able to advance their interests to prioritize the well-being of Nystrom residents and others who may be facing housing issues by meeting, sharing

recommendations, and posing questions to other relevant decision makers and stakeholders such as the Richmond Neighborhood Housing Services and Project Managers of the [Community Benefits Policy Development](#).

There are strong values and positive outcomes seen from all over the state of California related to having community members centered and empowered in spaces of decision making. In a recent study titled “People Power for Public Health” by the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN), based on findings from a statewide survey (n=913), county listening sessions (5 counties, n=416), and community leader interviews (n=12), it stated “CPEHN’s racial equity analyses of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) spending by counties demonstrated that robust community engagement was positively associated with just funding allocations. A key tenet of People Power for Public Health is the need for a just allocation of governmental spending at the local and statewide level to communities of color. This is needed to help communities recover not only from the pandemic but also the systemic racism and disinvestment that have harmed the health and economic wellbeing of these communities...A Just Allocation means INCREASED AND CONTINUOUS INVESTMENT in historically/currently disinvested communities and the organizations that serve these communities, DECREASED INVESTMENT IN SYSTEMS THAT ARE HARMFUL AND VIOLENT towards marginalized communities, PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROCESSES that meaningfully include communities in shaping their local budgets” (CPEHN, 2022).

It is possible to strengthen and transform our local democracies by inviting, centering, supporting, incentivizing, and sustaining community members to be meaningfully involved and engaged at the tables of decision-making. When creating a base of residents to work on systems transformation, there needs to be a robust outreach, recruitment, training, compensation, and an internal system of care to respond and heal from the traumas from systems and structural racism. This also allows for relationship and trust building between the community and their local jurisdiction. Improving the current windows of opportunity and increasing the number of opportunities for community members to be meaningfully engaged and be part of civic leadership will also significantly increase community power and system accountability in an equitable manner. Residents are the ones being directly impacted by the decisions, practices, policies, programs and culture of our institutions and systems which have historically and still to this day exclude many of those who face cumulative burdens and come from marginalized backgrounds. In order to improve the quality of life, well-being, living environment, and advance equity for all of our community members, we need to center and empower the most impacted residents and create new spaces and improve current spaces for them to directly be part and lead decision-making. This type of work of creating pathways to decision making for residents is relevant to ORESJ, Reimagine Safety CC, Budget Justice Coalition, and other initiatives.

Relevant Sources:

City of Richmond Workshop Evaluation 2020

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fIN3Qdj2xuEY0aQGHYxuqfEQ-yRNUympGA-A3_4u6w/edit?usp=sharing

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

<https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf>

Nystrom Village Housing Project 2019

<https://dl.airtable.com/.attachments/2e9d157b29ea4ed967d6138bb5bbcd11/4c3effa0/FinalPolicyBriefY-PLANAdultProject-NystromFall2019.pdf>

Community Benefits Policy Development

<https://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/4126/Community-Benefits-Policy-Development>

California Pan Ethnic Health Network People Power for Public Health August 2022

<https://cpehn.org/assets/uploads/2022/08/CPEHN.PeoplePowerForPublicHealthReport-FINAL.pdf>

- “CPEHN’s racial equity analyses of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) spending by counties demonstrated that robust community engagement was positively associated with just funding allocations (CPEHN, 2022). A key tenet of People Power for Public Health is the need for a just allocation of governmental spending at the local and statewide level to communities of color. This is needed to help communities recover not only from the pandemic but also the systemic racism and disinvestment that have harmed the health and economic wellbeing of these communities. In addition, we recommend statewide accountability measures to ensure that county budget allocations are responsive to community needs and that community members are involved in funding allocation decisions.”
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 - PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROCESSES that meaningfully include communities in shaping their local budgets.”