

Housing Stabilization Learning Cohort

Recruiting and Engaging People with Lived Experience for Your Core Team

This document was co-developed with the Housing Equity Strategist. Their insight and feedback was instrumental in building out this guiding resource.*

Why it is Important to Engage People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and Other Diverse Leaders on Your Core Team

People with Lived Experience/Expertise of Homelessness

- Engaging people with lived expertise is urgent and necessary as communities learn how to create more equitable systems. A strong network of partners and providers must include individuals with lived expertise to support planning and implementation efforts as well as to strategically target resources to increase housing placements, prevent homelessness, and improve homeless systems by advancing equity. [Meaningful engagement](#) results in system and programmatic implementations that are more relevant and responsive.
- While representation is essential on the core team, it is critical not to lean on or depend on just a few individuals to represent an entire population.

Black, Brown, Indigenous and other people of color

- By engaging Black, Brown, Indigenous and other people of color as partners and leaders on your team, you bring to the forefront voices and populations that have historically been marginalized and have been most negatively impacted by homeless system disparities and systemic racism.
- While representation is essential on the core team, it is critical not to lean on or depend on individuals to represent an entire population. The core team cannot expect a single member to represent their race, tribe, nation, or ethnicity.

Recruiting & Engaging PLEH

As you begin recruiting people with lived experience/expertise of homelessness (PLEH) to partner in your housing stabilization/prevention work, consider the following:

Important Reminders:

- Address barriers to ensure early and full inclusion and compensation of people with lived expertise, including on your initial working group;
- At the very minimum, your Core Prevention Team must include at least 2-3 members with lived experience involved in all design/decision-making during this Cohort;

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- There must be a structure in place to both compensate PLEH and to support their participation in all Cohort activities.

Strategies for Recruiting People with Lived Experience/Expertise of Homelessness

- Talk to providers, particularly those working on the front lines, directly with people experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless
- Look in places where folks with lived expertise already engage or participate
 - Food and clothing pantries
 - Drop-in centers/meal kitchens
 - Libraries
 - Faith-based advocacy organizations
- Develop clear talking points - how you will describe the work they would be doing, what the benefit and expectations of participating are, what is the time commitment, etc.

Sustaining meaningful engagement

Once you have a PLEH engagement structure and have recruited PLEH leaders on your Core Team, you will need to build in ways to continually sustain and build authentic partnerships:

- Be transparent and clear about compensation, ensure prompt payment, and offer flexible options to receive that compensation (direct cash payment, gift cards, etc.) if possible
- Value them as equal partners - do not tokenize PLEH partners; have direct conversations with other partners on your team to ensure you are maintaining authentic and safe spaces (be particularly mindful of adultism when you are working with young people with lived experience)
- Ensure that the relationship is reciprocal – be clear regarding what they will gain from participating as well as what the organization and community will gain from this relationship
- Always incorporate time for preparation and debrief before and after meetings
- Offer training & professional development
- Ensure that their participation will lead to changes in policies and priorities
- Check-in regularly with PLEH partners to ensure their participation continues to feel valued and that their voices are being heard

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Other Considerations

Compensation:

Remember, as you develop your team, it is important to ensure Core Team members are equitably compensated (if they are not already in a paid position) that supports their time on this project. Communities are responsible for ensuring this expense is covered.

- Consider how PLEH will be compensated
 - Some concerns may come up if compensation is coming from within the CoC structure/ political structure. Ensure that PLEH are able to speak their voice and not fear retaliation or retribution.
 - Ensure they have the latitude to be honest & critical without fear of losing compensation or housing
- Design your compensation policies to demonstrate and acknowledge the value and expertise they are bringing to the table (equitable compensation).
- Consider payment options so that benefits are not impacted.

Communication:

- Prepare people for the journey before they begin - be transparent about what they will be doing and why
- Create environments so that there is an honest conversation (so they are not feeling patronized or tokenized; there is a belief and feeling that they are truly advising on what is needed)
- Always provide information before meetings, breaking down information and transparently sharing information/ getting them the info they need to be fully present ahead of time -
 - Provide clear understanding of different/relevant funding sources or systems they will be impacting/advising on
 - Break down acronyms (don't use jargon)
- Ensure the group (team/community) understands that the PLEH are speaking from their own unique experience or perspective; other partners need to be aware of their own biases/defenses and come to the table open to hearing/learning from PLEH partners.
- Developing the PLEH's knowledge of the system may take time; once a foundation is established and trust is built they will be better positioned to have authentic conversations, ask questions and impart their knowledge and opinion.
- Being aware of who is coming to the table and individual perspectives/motivations and group dynamics; keeping the focus as productive/solutions oriented can be

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challenging and may require support from other team members to help navigate/facilitate conversations.

Logistical and Other Support Needs:

- Having separate space for PLEH (outside of the broader team/committees) is critical. This is important no matter what structure or model is implemented (PLEH may want space to discuss and support one another outside of the group)
- Team building / connection opportunities outside of just meeting (create space for building relationships/being in community with one another)
- *Power Sharing*: Need to be able to demonstrate within any structure/model a balance of power. This Team will need to create group agreements/charters that include how the group will make decisions, handle disagreements and powershare.
 - Adjust dynamics (power sharing) so that PLEH feel valued and valuable
 - What real change will PLEH see in their work? Are they being listened to? Has trust been established?
 - Need to ensure your structure is allowing for true partnership in an ongoing way, not one-off conversations
 - Need to be able to demonstrate that it is a mutual gain and that their equity in exchange (power sharing)
 - Outside of this project, how will communities continue to engage with PLEH meaningfully and incorporate their feedback/insight and include them in decision making?
 - Need for established rules in the group so that all are in the same mindset and there is shared responsibility (group agreements)
- Engagement has to be meaningful, impactful, and consistent
- Consider how you will provide training and support (i.e. advocacy training, facilitation training, Peer specialist training; public speaking; community organizing)

**Tips and best practices (resources):*

- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise](#)
- [Racial Equity Core Teams: The Engines of Institutional Change](#)
- [Engaging People with Lived Experience](#)