

# Designing and Identifying Spaces to Meaningfully Engage with People with Lived Experience of Homelessness (PWLEH)

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## Overview

Participants will learn about and discuss what it means to meaningfully engage with people with lived experiences and how to create opportunities for engagement. They will learn what it means to center people with lived experiences and what it looks like for them to be in decision-making spaces, leading to comprehensive solutions to end homelessness.

## Additional Details

To effectively address homelessness, it is essential to involve individuals who have personally experienced homelessness in developing and implementing solutions. In order to do this, we must first build a foundational relationship with those who have experienced homelessness to ensure their voices guide the strategies. Their unique insights and first-hand experiences can provide invaluable guidance and leadership in the efforts to combat and prevent homelessness.

Building relationships requires a change of behavior and engaging in a deliberate change management process. Organizations need to first assess readiness to build relationships with those who have experienced homelessness and build an infrastructure that allows it. It is equally important to assess readiness of those experiencing homelessness to build relationships with community organizations; assessing whether the system and its participants are open to engaging in co-design before involving individuals with lived experience. Organizations and leaders must collectively evaluate their readiness to co-design with individuals with lived experience and address several key considerations before starting the engagement process, which we will discuss in this session.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Having those with lived experience at the table is a must!

Showing value to those who have experienced the problem is paramount.

A seat at the table is not enough and can border on tokenism; we must carefully consider how to center people with lived experiences and ensure we are following their lead on decision-making.

## Considerations for Equity

Having inclusive voices is important to ensure that problems are addressed and solutions encompass the intersectionality of identity and culture. By including a wide range of voices, we can guarantee that the solutions put in place will take into account various cultural nuances, leading to more effective and inclusive outcomes.

It is important for communities to actively engage in the development of collaborative partnerships with organizations, support groups, and advocacy groups that represent people with lived experience (PWLEH). This engagement includes attending their meetings and events. Communities should seek opportunities to connect with, listen to, and engage directly with PWLEH. Authentic engagement involves fostering connections that are sincere and centered around the establishment of trust. It is crucial to be deliberate in getting to know PWLEH and to understand and support the aspects of the work that interest them most.

