# COMMUNITY VOICE MEASUREMENT QUESTIONS*

While there is growing evidence that incorporating the voice of those with lived experience can strengthen the ability of cross-sector initiatives to improve well-being and achieve equitable outcomes, there is little evidence within the context of cross-sector health-related collaborations on the best ways to engage residents or the best metrics to assess this engagement.

Strategies to include community voice can be either passive or active and are differentiated by the level of power and decision-making afforded to community members. While any level of engagement is better than none at all, local wellness funds should become aware of the spectrum of community engagement.

What follows are some insights and questions local wellness funds can consider for assessing their current strategies and developing a plan to increase equitable engagement.
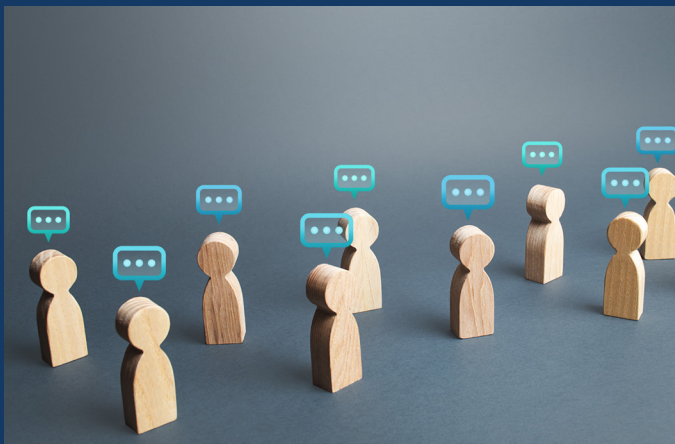
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recently partnered with the Georgia Health Policy Center to develop the Framework for Aligning Sectors. This framework identifies several factors as important for creating effective aligning efforts that last.[1] One of these factors is community voice. To promote the development of aligning practice and research, the Georgia Health Policy Center recently conducted a review of research on the conceptualization and measurement of community voice in the context of aligning efforts. This document highlights several questions from that review that were identified as superlatively important for understanding and advancing aligning efforts.

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* This brief on measurement questions to consider when assessing incorporation of community voice into health-related community collaboratives is part of a series produced by Aligning Systems for Health, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, on measuring the process and outcomes of aligning. The series is available here.

[1] Landers, G., Minyard, K., Lanford, D., & Heishman, H. (2020). A theory of change for aligning health care, public health, and social services in a time of COVID-19. *American Journal of Public Health*, *110*(S2), S178-S180.

Community voice can take many forms, and there are both ethical and practical reasons to include community voice in aligning efforts. The form and function of community voice will depend on factors such as the community in question, the purpose at hand, and whether active or passive community voice strategies are employed. Successful community voice strategies are likely to depend largely on how those strategies are supported, and success for the aligning effort overall is likely to be shaped by how community voice is leveraged. These insights imply several important questions about community in the context of aligning efforts. These are organized into seven groups below.

Who is the community?

- Who is being affected by the aligning effort?
- Who are the end users of aligned services?
- Who is participating in the aligning effort?
- Who are people referring to when they say "the community"?
- To what degree are all members of the communities in question represented?
- To what degree are underrepresented and disempowered parties participating?

When do community members have a voice? Examples could include —

- Priority-setting
- Enforcing accountability measures
- Resource allocation
- Information flows

Does the community voice strategy involve passive community voice?

- To what degree is community input being taken into the aligning effort?
- To what degree is community input shaping aligning processes?

Does the community voice strategy involve active community voice?

- To what degree are community members in leadership positions?
- To what degree do community members have decision-making power in the aligning effort as a whole?
- To what degree do community members have decision-making power in specific aligning processes, e.g., priority-setting, governance structures, data, and resource allocation?

Is community voice being supported?

- To what degree does the community have the capacity for giving voice?
- To what degree do partners have the capacity to support community voice?
- To what degree does the aligning effort support the community in giving voice?
- To what degree is the aligning effort training staff for community voice?
- To what degree is the community being supported to lead and take the initiative?
- To what degree is community member participation being retained or growing?
- To what degree is the aligning effort achieving reliable communication, regular contact, and transparency with community members?

How do community members perceive aligning efforts?

- To what degree do community members perceive aligning partners as "outsiders"?
- To what degree do community members perceive aligning efforts as serving community interests?
- To what degree do community members feel supported for participating?
- How do community members rate their ability to affect aligning efforts?

Is community being leveraged effectively?

- To what degree is community voice motivating aligning partners?
- To what degree is community voice improving the ability to raise funds?
- To what degree is community participation building community member leadership skills?
- To what degree is community voice shaping aligning processes and outcomes?
- What community relationships are already available to be built upon?

> ## 💡 TIP
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> Passive and active community voice strategies are regularly described as being harder than expected for everyone involved. Payoffs are often described as worthwhile, but ineffective community voice strategies can be harmful to everyone. Aligners should carefully consider the community relationships that are already in place and consider building from that point. They should also consider their own ability to work with community members, and they should be straightforward with community members about their abilities. This can serve as a foundation for effective community partnerships but requires careful assessment of the community voice elements mentioned above.