

Beyond the Public Meeting Notice:

Meaningful Engagement of Community Partners in Criminal Justice Planning Boards

April 22, 2025

2025 Criminal Justice Advisory Board
(CJAB) Conference



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NCJA Center for Justice Planning



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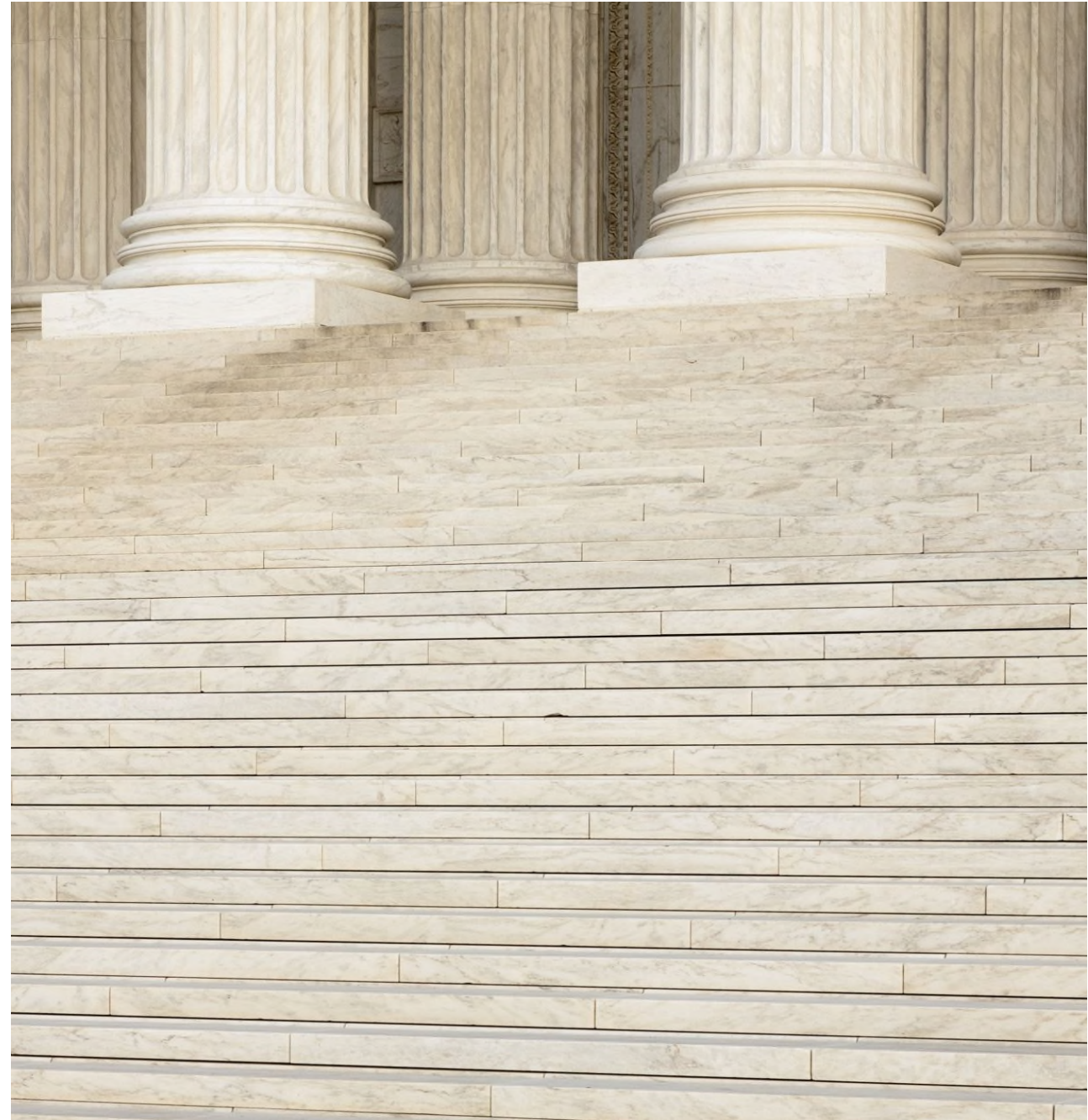
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About NCJA

Who are We? Non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. representing state, local and tribal governments and practitioners across the criminal justice community

Purpose: strengthen criminal justice communities and improve lives by empowering stakeholders through training, collaboration and advocacy.

- *Convener & Facilitator*
 - *Advocate & Liaison*
 - *Thought Leader*
- *Training & Technical Assistance (TTA) Provider*



About The NCJA Center for Justice Planning



With support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), NCJA's Center for Justice Planning (NCJP) provides training and technical assistance (TTA) to state administering agencies (SAAs) managing the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) program and the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (Byrne SCIP). The NCJP also provides TTA to local Criminal Justice Planning Boards (CJPBs).



This TTA program provides a wide variety of resources and guidance to help SAAs ensure Byrne JAG and Byrne SCIP funding is administered effectively, from planning to reporting outcomes.

Session Overview



Collaborative stakeholder engagement is a critical component of any criminal justice planning effort. Building meaningful relationships can lead to better solutions, avoid duplication of efforts and help comprehensively leverage resources in your community. The first step in building foundational trust includes cultivating genuine and meaningful relationships.

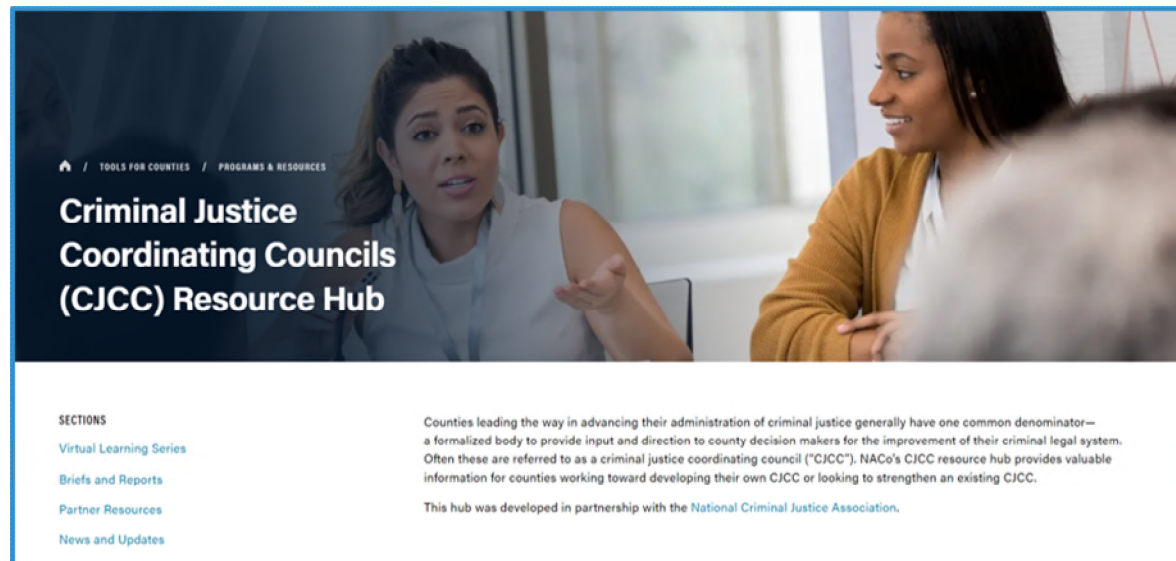
Building and sustaining relationships is hard, ongoing work – ***but you can't do it alone!***

Partnering across systems through collaborative stakeholder engagement creates collective ownership and increased buy-in. Today, we will discuss practical strategies for fostering partnerships to advance meaningful engagement and relationship building through the themes of:

- *Breaking down silos*
- *Improving processes*
- *Increasing engagement*

Sources

- Partnership with National Association of Counties (NACo)
 - [Unlock the Power of CJCCs: Responsive Policies Through Community Engagement](#)
- [NCJP Strategic Planning Toolkit](#)
- NCJA Public Safety Funding and Budgeting Committee



Who/What is a Community Partner...?



“Organizations or individuals with a stake in the community ranging from substance-use treatment centers, mental healthcare providers, violence prevention interventionists and other non-profits who help those who have been affected by the system. In addition to engaging service providers and organizational partners, it is crucial to involve a broader range of community members, including crime survivors and general community participants. Those with lived experience, whether formerly justice-impacted individuals and/or crime survivors, are essential to system processes.”

We invite partners, practitioners, providers and system professionals to come together and uniquely define community as it best fits their individual needs, characteristics, strengths and challenges.”

- NCJA Public Safety Funding and Budgeting Committee, August 2024



Who/What is a System Partner...?

“Government agencies, particularly those in the criminal justice system. For this document’s purposes, this typically includes agencies who administer grants and/or make public safety budget and funding decisions.”

- NCJA Public Safety Funding and Budgeting Committee, August 2024



Check In:

Does anyone have community members as part of their CJAB?

Start with the Why...

Why Engage the Community?



- Build Relationships
- Gather and Share Information
- Improve Outcomes
- Increase Capacity
- Avoid Duplication
- Leverage Resources
- Develop effective solutions
- Advance Sustainability

Why Should System Partners Engage the Community?



The answer may seem obvious, but clearly defining and understanding this ‘why’ is the first step to creating genuine partnerships.

Why Should System Partners Engage the Community?



"Nothing about us without us." Supporting communities with community input and feedback, and the overall co-creation of key decisions, maximizes outcomes and increases sustainability.

A broad array of perspectives leads to more robust solution development and improved outcomes.

It is important to build trust where trust does not exist.

Setting a precedent to help with the sustainability of present and future funding.

Investments should directly impact the lives of community members and be informed on the front end by those most impacted by the issue being addressed.

The Who...

Key Insights and
Recommendations on *Who* to
Engage...



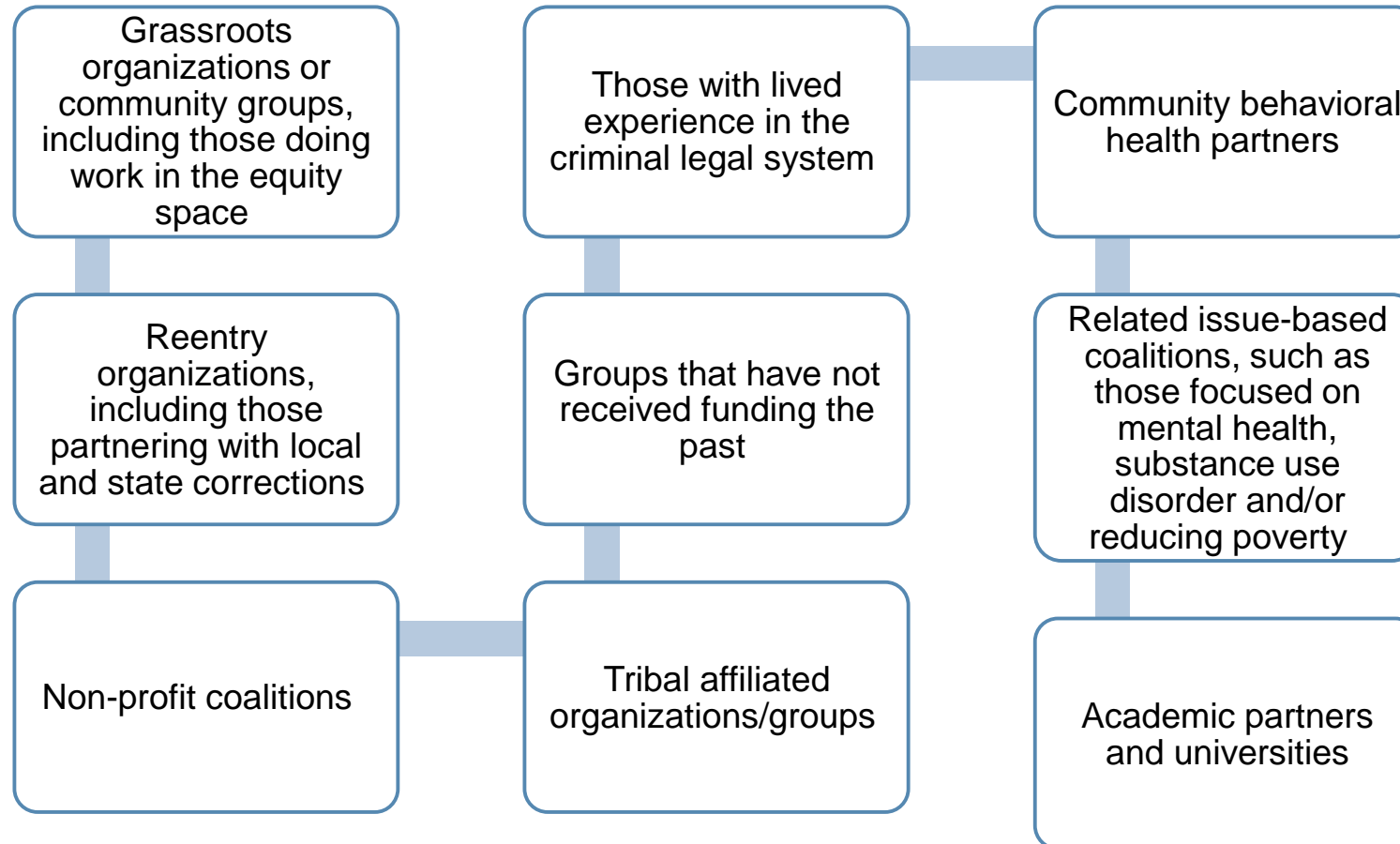
Who Should System Partners Engage in the Community?



Who we are engaging is essential to the work. In addition to who is traditionally included, it is important to identify non-traditional stakeholders and groups who should be involved.

Who Should System Partners Engage in the Community?

Partners to engage may include, but are not limited to:



Who Should System Partners Engage in the Community?

Partners to engage may include, but are not limited to:





Discussion Questions

What other partners could be engaged/do you engage in your work?

If you have community members on your CJAB, how did you identify these members? Was there a specific process (application, etc.)?

Do you have an orientation for members prior to participation?

The How...

Key Insights and
Recommendations on *how* to
Engage the Community in a
Meaningful Way

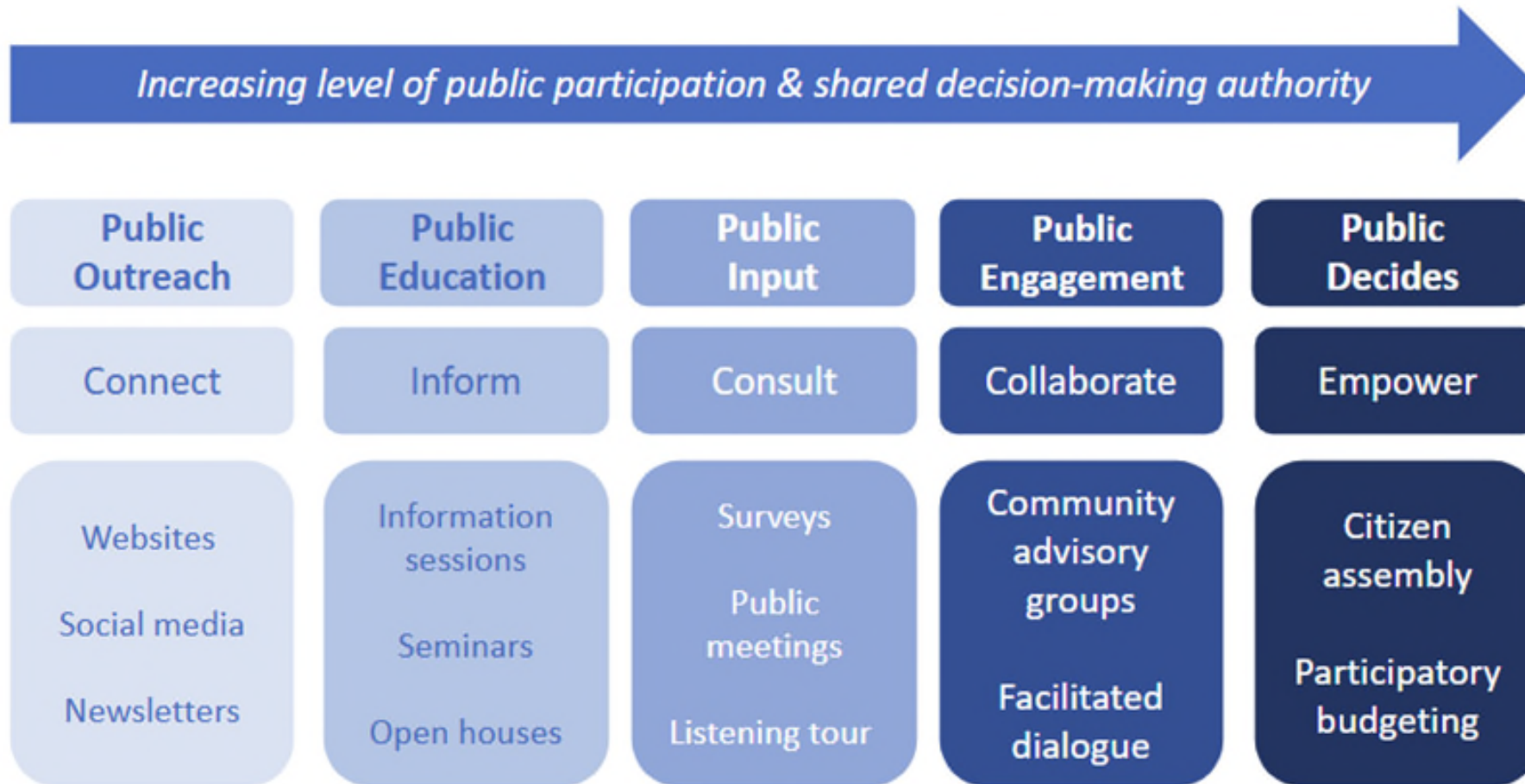


How Should System Partners Engage the Community?



Community engagement can often appear or feel like a “check the box” exercise. It’s important that community engagement is conducted with intention, thought and authenticity, recognizing that community is not a monolith.

The Spectrum of Engagement

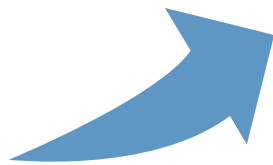


The Three C's

Cooperation

Coordination

Collaboration



Strive for Collaboration

Three steps to Integration	Likelihood of achieving outcomes	Characteristics	Examples
Cooperation	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informal• Limited structure• Limited risk• Light info sharing	LE meets with neighborhood associations
Coordination	Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasingly formal• Task based interactions• Identification of roles• Shared risk• Goals	Drug courts
Collaboration	Ideal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very formal• Defined mission and outcomes• Focus on results rather than activities• Demanding sustainable results• All accountable to goals	Gun violence prevention



How Should System Partners Engage the Community?

Understand and acknowledge the power dynamics between system partners and the community.



Humanize your processes.



Ensure balanced representation in the planning processes (i.e., don't have 10 system partners and one community member represented in planning processes and meetings).



Compensate community partners for their time and expertise.



Listen! - Especially as a system partner. Keep in mind there is already a power imbalance.



Transparency and honesty



How Should System Partners Engage the Community?

Understand capacity and resources of community partners vs. system partners.



Community partners should be treated as subject matter experts, and lived experience and front-line knowledge should be considered invaluable forms of expertise.



Begin engagement early and often



Language matters!



Initiate outreach; provide an orientation for new participants/board members



Create a space for equal partnership

How to Get Started with Engagement:

01

Initiating engagement can be intimidating. Map it out before you start.

02

Understand the power dynamics at play as a system partner.

03

Identify the relevant stakeholders and organizations.

04

Find a point of contact within the organization to act as a liaison.

Community Engagement in Practice: Charleston County, South Carolina

- ***Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council***

- The Charleston County CJCC convenes a group of Community Representatives to serve as community advisors within their CJCC. Their input is considered in the decision-making process. The community representatives elect one community representative to serve on the Executive Committee. Representation is intended to be encompass a wide variety of the community.
- In addition to the community representatives, the Charleston County CJCC also holds community forums and conducts surveys to engage community members in priority identification and goal setting.



Community Engagement in Practice: Coconino County, Arizona

- ***Coconino County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council***

- The Coconino County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council consists of 22 voting members and additional associate members, including a community representative and an indigenous community advocate.
- Through their strategic planning process, the Coconino County CJCC developed the following subcommittees to oversee priority areas and inform initiatives:
 - Behavioral Health Sub-Committee
 - Indigenous Initiatives Sub-Committee
 - Community Engagement Sub-Committee
 - Juvenile Justice Sub-Committee



The When...

Key Insights and
Recommendations on *When*
and How Often to Engage with
Community...



Key Insights and Recommendations from Community Partners on When and How Often to Engage the Community in a Meaningful Way



Engagement must be done at the right time(s) and ongoing to ensure its effectiveness.

Year-round effort

Strategic planning initiatives.

Through full-time, community engagement staff (are they able to be physically present in the community regularly?).

Ensure there are support systems for community engagement positions so that all is not lost when a person leaves the position or leadership turnover impacts the prioritization of these goals.

Practice endless engagement in the face of barriers; lean into patience and humility.

Frequent engagement is key; initiate a feedback loop.

The What...

Key Insights and
Recommendations on **What**
processes/activities/decisions
in Which to Engage
Community...



*What
processes/activities/de
cisions should the
community be
engaged in?*

- Convening community stakeholders to inform funding and policy decisions/recommendations
- Community meetings- transparent, consistent communication and comprehensive information provided
- Compensate community members for their expertise – providing testimony at community meetings, participation in focus groups, etc.
- Development of outcome measures – include community voice and allow flexibility on definition of success; develop outcome measures collaboratively with community members and funded partners
- Eligibility criteria and guidelines (flexibility in requirements allows broader access)

*What
processes/activities/de
cisions should the
community be
engaged in?*

- Focus groups/town halls/open discussions
- Meaningful engagement – engagement with express intent to utilize feedback and provide follow up communication
-
- Prioritize robust, diverse engagement – who is in the room? Who is not in the room? Who has not been engaged in the past?
- Prioritize language access
- Strategic planning processes - include priority identification for funding and resources

Challenges

Engaging with system partners can be challenging, intimidating and sometimes fraught with trauma and assumptions from past experiences.



Both the system partners and the community partners need to know their roles and expectations. When roles are clear, you can leverage each other and work together to make change happen.



Discussion Questions

What challenges have you experienced when working to engage community in your work?

How have you navigated these challenges?

Examples of successful engagement to share?

Closing Key Recommendations



- Increasing meaningful community engagement is just one essential tool in creating a more collaborative criminal justice system. Recognizing that meaningful improvement must be guided by the lived experiences of those most impacted, many state and local agencies are seeking new and inclusive ways to build trust and engage communities in their planning and funding processes.
- Building foundational trust begins with cultivating genuine and meaningful relationships. We hope this session and the accompanying resources, has provided you with valuable insights and actionable strategies. By incorporating these practices into your daily work, you can play a vital role in fostering accessibility, and meaningful engagement within your communities. Together, we can create a more just and accessible future.

Additional Resources

Byrne JAG Support for Local Agencies



Justice Counts Flyer



Questions



Thank you!



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<https://www.ncja.org>



<https://www.ncja.org/strategic-planning>

Thank you for your time and commitment to this important work!