Community Engagement

Community engagement refers to the process of involving and empowering individuals, groups, and communities in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It is a two-way communication process that promotes active participation and collaboration between community members and organizations. The goal of community engagement is to build strong and resilient communities by fostering trust, promoting social cohesion, and addressing community needs. Effective community engagement requires a willingness to listen, understand, and respond to community concerns, as well as a commitment to transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Overall, community engagement is essential for creating positive social change and promoting equitable outcomes for all members of a community.

Why creating meaningful community engagement will improve outcomes?

Often when social programs are in the exploration or planning phase of development of a program or initiative, the typical strategy to get input or feedback from community has been focus groups, community meetings or seek a few individuals with live experience to be the voice of said strategies. Usually, these strategies are limiting as it may not be representative of the community as a whole or of their needs and may result in being more informing or consulting rather than collaborative or participatory engagement. To have meaningful impact, systems have to consider alternative approaches to the typical engagement strategies this may mean shifting mental models that systems know best and allow the community to take a more active role in design and decision making. to have the lived experience voice needed without resulting in tokenizing certain individuals to be representative of the various cultural groups.

When planning for community engagement there are several questions that need to be kept at the forefront.
1. What's the purpose for the engagement?
2. To what extent are we engaging?
3. Will there be interest and trust from community to engage?
4. Who is best suitable to engage the community?
5. What are the best strategies to engage community?
6. What communications strategies are needed?

Having clear objectives and outcomes, and establishing parameters and negotiable are essential to the process. Additionally, an understanding of the broader audience will guide not only the type of engagement chosen but also the community style employed.

How we engage with communities depends on the degree of influence given to the community in a decision-making process (top-down seeking to inform or bottom-up relationship-based decision-making process). Community members are engaged when they play a meaningful role in both the design and decision-making process and the implementation of the change that impacts them. Systems need to consider broadening the role of government entities to be more of a thoughtful partner, including being a facilitator and collaborator, for instance, empower local CBOs and community leaders (i.e. leaders in communities, community navigators, community workers, promotoras, etc..) to drive the conversations and engagement needed. Loosening the hold on a top-down approach also instills trust in community members to meaningfully engage in issues that they are passionate about or impacts them.

Some suggestions to consider is possibly increasing capacity of CBOs to empower and engage the community they work with on behalf of the system (building capacity). Utilizing the eco-system and networks that already exists and leveraging the longstanding trusting relationship CBOs have with community to bring the voice of lived experience in the design or improvement of system or program design (i.e., Promotoras, Community Advisory Groups, Neighborhood Associations, PTA, etc.) we could have diverse and equitable representation throughout the County. Utilizing human-centered design, communities can be engaged more intentionally and ensuring diversity and equitably representation in the design while lifting the unique needs of the various communities. This way, communities are engaged in the development and decision-making and have buy-in to improve service delivery and will have more impactful outcomes. Because CBOs have a long-standing relationship with communities they support, it provides a safe space for communities to share any insights into community sentiments, values, concerns, and an in-depth view into what they have to say about issues that affect their neighborhoods and families. This is important in order to maximize public involvement in the design and development of programs or initiatives and to improve the system designed to support and serve them in time of need. This also means that systems may need to take more of a

supportive role rather than lead role. Consider having a dedicated trusting position withing the system that CBOs can build relationship with and be the point of contact, that is representative of and culturally competent, to support and lift up challenges or barriers as well as building a communication feedback loop to the system of care. This would be in addition to System of Care Community Advisory Committee, that would include key leaders from the before mentioned groups and lived experience supported by the prior mentioned dedicated position and lead in a rotational basis by community leaders.

What can it look like?

Choosing the best community engagement strategy is key. Engagement is a continuum and not a "one and done" type of strategy. The level of engagement will depend on the impact on decision making and implementation of the strategies, it will be on a continuum (see image below), fluid and flexible. Ideally the engagement goal is to collaborate and empower, but we also recognize that in order to get to this point it will require building trust and shifting the mindset within our system in regard to shifting power and allowing the necessary time to build capacity and knowledge on best approaches and practices. By utilizing existing CBO community groups and having their leaders be members of the Community Advisory Committee as part of the System of Care, the infrastructure as part of the System of Care will allow for equitable and diverse voices to help inform system shifts, policies and process.

Increasing Impact on Decision-Making and Implementation				
INFORMING	**CONSULTING**	**INVOLVING**	**COLLABORATING**	**EMPOWERING**
Providing balanced and objective information about new programs or services, and about the reasons for choosing them	Inviting feedback on alternatives, analyses, and decisions related to new programs or services	Working with community members to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are considered at every stage of planning and decision-making. We also engage their assets as partners to implement solutions.	Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services. Community members actively produce outcomes.	Giving community members sole decision-making authority over new programs or services, and lead work to implement solutions. Professionals only serve in consultative and supportive roles
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to your input and feedback, and let you know your ideas and concerns have influenced decisions	We will ensure your input and feedback is directly reflected in alternatives, and let you know how your involvement influenced decisions. We will engage you as partners to implement solutions.	We will co-create and co-produce solutions with you. You will be true partners in making and implementing decisions for the community, your advice and recommendations will be incorporated as much as possible.	We will support your decisions and work to implement solutions.
Fact sheets, newsletters, websites, open houses	Surveys, focus groups, community meetings and forums	Community organizing, leadership development, workshops	Advisory boards, seats on governing boards, engaging and funding as partners	Support full governance, leadership, and partnership

Where are we in the process:

- Are members of the planning team reflective of the diverse community we serve?
- Are community members from marginalized communities represented? (e.g.- racial groups effected by disproportionality, disabilities, LGBTQIA+, etc..)
- Are people with lived expertise in the group and representative of the community?
- How are you preparing and including community members in the planning process? (onboarding and capacity building)
- Does the Community Advisory Committee have a charter and is it formalized?

We currently have lived experience representation at the table, they are engaged and actively involved in the exploration and planning phase. This was achieved by having contracts with two CBOs (Pacific Clinics and Dependency Advocacy Center) who are currently allocating two (2) FTEs to have youth and parent voice supporting both the system of care and family first initiative, as well as Native representation by having two (2) FTEs dedicated within DFCS. One consideration needed to explore further is how representative their voice is of the community and how we can develop their skill set to be the connector to community, youth and parents to engage them and bring their voice and choice. In addition, SSA has hired former foster youth to lead Youth Participatory Action Research to help inform through research and data, program and system improvements.

Recommendation for Community Engagement and Equitable Representation

Items for consideration:

1. Create a Community Advisory Committee that is reflective of and membership includes leaders from community (i.e. Promotoras, Native members, etc..). Create a safe space for advisory members to ensure they feel welcome and valued.
2. Develop feedback loop from all existing advisory groups to CYSOC and FFI.
3. Engagement with existing advisory groups should be done by a dedicated individual that can build trust and support engagement AND bring in the youth and parent voice in the system of care work, as well as supporting identified individuals to be a member of CYSOC and FFI and enable them to participate and be an active voice in the aspects of planning and decision making. Depending on where the existing advisory groups are on the continuum, informing and/or consulting to being more collaborating or empowering, with participatory research (human centered design) have them inform areas of improvement and evaluation of how well we are being inclusive, engaging and empowering.
4. Engage with CBOs that have existing community advisory groups and include them in the engagement strategies. The voice of existing CBO community committees will be more diverse and will be more inclusive and representative of community.
5. Sustainability, consistent feedback loops and proper compensation will require resources (staff, time and money)

6. If inviting community members to come to meetings consider the following:
    a. Room set-up to feel equal status.
    b. Be aware of power differential, types of power, and equalizing power in the room
    c. Be aware of language and acronyms
    d. Honor their time and input
    e. Create space for speaking times and roles in agenda
    f. Co-facilitate meetings with community members
    g. Create a trusting and collaborative culture by being transparent and having open dialogue/communication (create feedback loops)
    h. Consider providing food and/or beverages and/or culturally appropriate tangible items in appreciation/compensation for their valued time and voice.

Advisory Team	Lead Contact	Email	Level of Engagement
DFCS ICWA – Native American and Indigenous Persons	Justo Valenzuela Marisol Agustinez Supported currently by Carla Torres	justo.valenzuela@ssa.sccgov.org marisol.agustinez@ssa.sccgov.org carla.Torres@ssa.sccgov.org	COLLABORATING
MCCT- Multi-Cultural Community Team	Contractor- Liz Stewart Byron Myers Rocio Abundis	Liz Stewart: ejskingdomlife2012@yahoo.com rocio.abundis@ssa.sccgov.org Byron.Myers@ssa.sccgov.org	INVOLVING
Parent Advisory Group – DFCS	QPI coordinator- just hired – Gilbert Murillo	gilbert.murillo@ssa.sccgov.org	INVOLVING
Resource Parent Advisory Group	QPI coordinator- just hired – Gilbert Murillo	gilbert.murillo@ssa.sccgov.org	CONSULTING
Pacific Clinics- Hope Center	Jorge Mata- Hope Center Manager Clinical Director- Simon Purse	jorge.mota@pacificclinics.org spurse@pacificclinics.org	INVOLVING
Behavioral Health Wrap-around youth committee	Melissa Praeder- used to be Nancy Nation- not sure	melissa.Preader@hhs.sccgov.org	INVOLVING

	who assigned to right now		
YAC- Youth Advisory Counsel- Probation	Probation	james.manning@pro.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)	New QPI coordination Gilbert Murillo	gilbert.murillo@ssa.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Parent Advisory Group with REAL	Carla Torres	Carla.torres@ssa.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Women and Men's Groups	Carla Torres	Carla.torres@ssa.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
The Hub – Youth Center (DFCS) – and Youth Engagement Specialist	Marisela Martinez Gilbert Murillo	Marisela.martinez@ssa.sccgov gilbert.murillo@ssa.sccgov.org	**CONSULTING**
Parent Advocate Contract with Alum Rock	Ayanna Vanderbilt	Ayanna.Vanderbilt@ssa.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
CSEC Youth Engagement Specialist – Transformational Team at DFCS (in the hiring process)	Marie Mauboussin Ronnie Smith	Marie.Mauboussin@ssa.sccgov.org Ronni.Smith@ssa.sccgov.org Leticia.Gonzalez@ssa.sccgov.org	**CONSULTING**
Youth Engagement Specialist involved in Youth Lead research (SSA)	Sofia Gomez	sofia.gomez@ssa.sccgov.org	**COLLABORATING**
South County Youth Task Force – youth and parent partners involved	Bernice Aguilera	baguilera@dao.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Probation Community Work – NSU	Charmayne Moran	Charmayne.Moran@pro.sccgov.org	**COLLABORATING**
Office of Disability Affairs (ODA) – Disability Community Advisory Group	Maribel Martinez	maribel.martinez@ceo.sccgov.org	**COLLABORATING**
Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Affairs (OLGBTQA) - LGBTQ+ Older Adult Community Advisory Workgroup	Sera Fernando	sera.fernando@ceo.sccgov.org	**COLLABORATING**
Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention (OGBVP)	Carla Collins	carla.collins@ceo.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Office of Children and Families Policy (OCFP) – Youth Taskforce	Melissa Luu	melissa.luu@ceo.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**

Office of Women's Policy (OWP) – Juvenile Justice Gender Responsive Collaborative (JJGRC)	Ketzal Gomez	ketzal.gomez@ceo.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Office of Women's Policy (OWP) – Commission on the Status of Women	Julie Ramirez	julie.ramirez@ceo.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) – Food Retail Advisory Group	Irene Cermeno	irene.cermeno@ceo.sccgov.org	**INVOLVING**
City of San Jose			
City of San Jose ***Commissions** **Youth** **Senior** **Parks** **Education and Library** **Appointed by City Council, members of community – high school through older adults*	Laura Buzo	Youth: megan.maloy@sjlibrary.org Seniors: Jeremy.shoffner@sanjoseca.gov Education: michelle.ornat@sjlibrary.org Parks: annie.wong@sanjoseca.gov	Involving/Empowering-Senior, Parks, Education & Library Collaborating/Empoering-Youth Commission)
Franklin McKinley Children's Initiative	Deyanira Hurtado	dhurtado@catholiccharitiesscc.org>	Collaborating
Si Se Puede Collaborative	Gabriel Hernandez	gabriel@sspcmayfair.org	Empowering
Somos Mayfair Initiative	Victor Vasquez	vduarte@somosmayfair.org	
Seven Trees Neighborhood Association	Avan Duong (serves as point of contact)	Avan.duong@sanjoseca.gov	Empowering
City of San Jose, Community Centers (engage school age, seniors, teens/young adults, and families from 10 different communities in San Jose)	Maria de Leon	Maria.deleon@sanjoseca.gov	Involving
Youth Liberation Movement – (youth/young adult advocates)	Courtney Portal	courtney@groundworkconsulting.org	Collaborating
Project Hope – (engage 9 Neighborhood Associations/ Communities in San Jose)	Hilda Morales (serves as point of contact)	hilda.morales@sanjoseca.gov	Collaborating & Empowering
Kids In Common	Dana Bunnett	dbunnett@kidsincommon.org	Consulting

Strong Start Collaborative - [engage early education advocates (SCCOE, cbo, County, school districts, licensed childcare centers, etc.) across the County]	Matthew Tinsley	Mtinsleysccoe.org	Consulting
School/City Collaborative – (engage school districts, schools, City dept., & cbo)	Michelle Ornat	Michelle.ornat@sanjoseca.gov	Consulting
Latino College Prep/Parent Group	Martin Farfan	mfarfan@tfhe.org	Consulting

Additional consideration related to engaging with CBOs.

CBO community advisory committees are more aware of community needs and are actively involved within their community. These are leaders of their community and can be leveraged to be more inclusive. Consider enhancing contracts to include community engagement as well as funding for compensation for community member's time. Have CBOs be the conduit of lived experience voice and develop a communication feedback loop to community members to systems, as well as have CBOs and/or community leaders be at the table within the System of Care infrastructure. Allow CBOs to lead the conversations within their existing community/parent/youth workgroups where SSA is just supporting and partnering in the process and not driving the process. Selected CBOs will need to be able to provide stipends to individuals engaged in the work, and ensure proper documentations is maintained. Support CBOs with capacity building to successfully engaging lived experience and provide a mechanism for barriers to be discussed and addressed that will support the system of care and families first initiative.

CBO	Level of Engagement	Main Contact	Funding Needed
SOMOS Mayfair (Si Se Puede Collective)			
Catholic Charities • **Valley Palms** • **San Ysidro** **Nueva Vida**			
Pacific Clinics	INVOLVING	jorge.mota@pacificclinics.org spurse@pacificclinics.org	

Alum Rock Counseling Services Inc.			
Bill Wilson			
Community Solutions			
Gardner			
Next Door Solutions			
Rebeka's Children Services (RCS)			
Sacred Heart Community Services			
Uplift			

Community Advisory Team

The Community Advisory Team is important to develop and improve the current systemic operations of the Children and Youth System of Care. This team will be a group of individuals with lived experience, considered subject matter experts in their community. Their role will be to provide guidance on the vision of the system of care, advice based on experience and community need and make recommendations for new procedures that might increase overall efficiency and effective services to children, youth and families in the community.

Currently DFCS has contracts with Pacific Clinics and DAC to have 2 youth and 2 parent representatives with lived experience to be part of the system of care work. These individuals will be provided the training, capacity building and support to lead the development of the Advisory Team. In addition, DFCS and system partners have various community groups with lived experience that need to be leveraged, members from these groups need to be recruited to be part of the advisory team and help design and create a feedback loop that will keep those community groups informed and provide them with the space and opportunity to provide feedback/input in the effectiveness of the system of care initiatives and overall work.

Compensation for participation and representation will need to be considered and it should be an equitable hourly rate, or other proper compensation as agreed upon by the team.

Training to build capacity:
1. System of Care (AB2083) and Families First overview
2. Understanding the work of Prevention (first, second and tertiary)
3. ICPM Training
4. Compassionate System and Collective Impact Training
5. How to lead and facilitate conversations and meetings
6. Training on human centered design
7. Racial Equity
8. Trauma Informed Care

9.