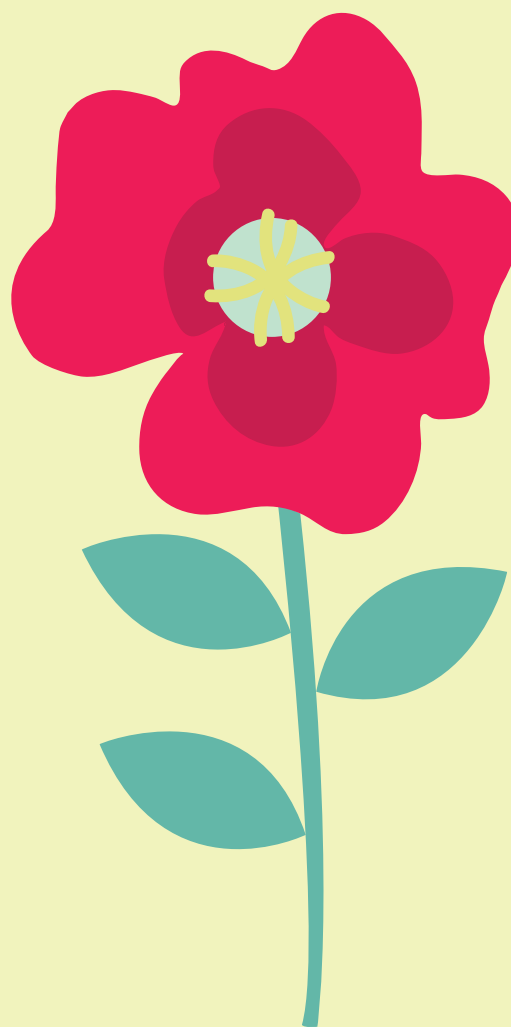


Building Meaningful Community Partnerships

Lessons Learned in the First Year of the Sexual Health Equity
for Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities
(SHEIDD) Community Advisory Group (CAG)



Youth Sexual Health Equity Program

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+ Build Community

Personal connection fosters enjoyment, trust and commitment.

- **Start each meeting with a grounding activity.** We began our time together by sharing a rose, something that's going well for us personally or professionally, and a thorn, something that's challenging. This helped us get to know and support each other and maintain our relationships in and outside of CAG meetings.
- **Provide snacks.** Sharing food makes everything more enjoyable!

+ Designate a CAG Coordinator

This may be a person or team who may be familiar with the project goals and work plan, facilitate meetings, share agendas, send out requests for input on special projects and generally track and guide the CAG's activities.

- Our SHEIDD project lead performed this role.

+ Be Transparent

Clear expectations and communication are key to effective collaboration.

- **Share the goals of the project with potential and current CAG members in a number of ways.** We created and used:
 - A simple visual illustrating the overall vision of the project.
 - A simple text-based document outlining the project vision and key goals.
 - A more detailed text document explaining key project objectives and the anticipated role of the CAG.
- **Create group agreements in the first meeting.**
- **Decide how to make key decisions as a group.** The CAG chose to try a consensus-based model to make decisions called "Fist to Five" that we still use when we need to decide how to move forward as a group.
- **Build CAG member familiarity with proposed project activities, get feedback, make adjustments and provide updates on progress.** We periodically toured our project work plan by taping the goals, objectives, activities and timeline to the meeting room wall and discussing its alignment with community needs.
- **Keep everyone in the loop with clear communication before/during/after meetings.**
 - Reminder emails with draft agendas were sent out before each meeting and notes from the meeting were sent out promptly thereafter.
 - Focused requests for feedback or assistance between meetings were made sparingly, ideally at least one week in advance. Provide meaningful opportunities for the CAG to guide the project and make decisions.

+ Treat CAG Members as the Experts They Are

Provide meaningful opportunities for the CAG to guide the project and make decisions.

- **Ask them about what they know about how to work effectively as a group.** We started our year by considering what the group knew about collaboration.
- **Recognize and draw on the CAG's expertise.**
 - We co-designed a needs assessment together.
 - CAG members volunteered to become members of our research team and conducted surveys and focus groups with us.
 - We created a vision of the future with ideas for how we could get there that formed the basis of our second year program implementation plan.

+ Be Flexible

Asking for feedback means being open to changing plans of action and adjusting timelines.

- **Recognize that the direction of the project may shift.** Some CAG feedback sessions challenged assumptions and left our team reeling. These moments turned out to be some of the most transformative and were signs of building greater understanding. The unconventional needs assessment tools that we developed are an example of this.

+ Find Interactive Ways to Get Feedback

Use a variety of interactive methods to provide opportunities for all CAG members to participate in co-creating the project.

- Examples of different strategies we've used with a popular education approach are gallery tour/carousel activities, wall work plan exploration, individual sticky note brainstorming, graphic facilitation, improv/theater games and role playing.

+ Share Power and Resources

Demonstrate commitment to be led by, capacitate and bring resources into the community.

- **Value and respect members' time and efforts by providing opportunities for CAG members to receive equitable compensation for their participation.** Be mindful that some members may be able to participate on work time, others on a volunteer basis.
 - We worked with the CAG to develop equitable criteria for CAG member honoraria and to compensate members of our research team who conducted surveys and focus groups with us.

- We made arrangements to support CAG members who needed assistance with transportation to the meetings.
- **Facilitate relevant professional development opportunities.**
 - We offered to cover the registration cost of CAG members attending a local cross-disability conference.
 - We provided training to members of our research team on conducting surveys and focus groups.

+ Celebrate

Being relied on as an expert can be exhausting. Take time to appreciate the work of the group and acknowledge strengths.

- We took time to celebrate periodically with affirmations and tokens of appreciation like stickers, flowers and candy.
- We mixed celebrating during meetings with task-oriented activities.

+ Reflect

Make time to think about why and how you're doing the work. This opens up opportunities to be reminded of the project vision, recommit to it and improve processes.

- We regularly considered questions like: Why are we here? What are our goals? What have we accomplished? What do I contribute to this group and project? How can we make community partnerships stronger? Who's not represented in our work? How can we be more inclusive?