Building Legal-Community Partnerships

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Purpose of this Guide

Building accountability with the clients and communities we serve is critical to ensure the work of civil legal aid organizations is responsive, dynamic, and aligned with the interests of those who are most affected by poverty, racism, and other forms of structural oppression. This guide aims to lay out key principles and strategies to guide organizations, particularly organizations that provide direct legal services, by outlining the relationship-building activities required to develop authentic partnerships with community-based groups and alignment with community lawyering principles.

Although community outreach and engagement practices such as marketing services, focus groups, listening sessions, and trainings offer value, this guide does not focus these practices, nor does it intend to replace the many excellent resources available on community lawyering and advocacy strategies. Instead, this resource offers guidance to support the building of long-term and mutually-accountable relationships between legal organizations and those most impacted by structural injustice. Funding for this guide has generously been provided by the Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid and the Washington State Access to Justice Board.

Overview

Often within legal organizations, community partnership-building is under-prioritized due to the urgency to serve as many clients as possible. Traditionally, meeting the legal needs of individuals through direct services displaces the opportunities to challenge underlying root causes of why people require legal services in the first place. While addressing critical client needs should remain a critical feature of any organization providing direct legal services, client accountability alone does not consider the structural harms that are engineered to generate an endless waitlist of cases for legal organizations across the country.

To understand root causes and better understand the needs and priorities of the clients and communities we aim to serve, we use a modified approach – cultivating accountability to both clients *and* communities most impacted by structural oppression through meaningful relationship-building and the shifting of institutional power.

Cultivating accountability and shifting power comes with its challenges, given the ways white supremacy culture plays out in our professional environments. Often organizational decision-makers ask, "What is the value of community engagement? Why should we spend money on this?" or, "We already can't serve the people coming through our door; why would we sacrifice more time to reach even more communities we may not be able to help?" Statements like these are indeed understandable, particularly given the high volume of legal issues created by capitalistic societal structures that devalue, ignore, and sometimes target those without income or power. However, we run the risk of creating a false dichotomy of choosing between taking on more cases and relationship-building with impacted communities. It fuels paternalistic notions of who is best positioned to identify problems and develop solutions. And, it leads to solutions that sometimes lack the critical community perspective that would otherwise ensure what is done aligns with what the community wants and needs, as those directly on the receiving end of the law and justice systems most acutely know what must change.

Regardless of the type of work our organizations focus on or what stage of development our community relationships are, this guide intends to encourage building relationships in ways that center lived experiences and leadership from communities most impacted by poverty, racism, and oppression. While more time and resource-intensive, this is also where great opportunities lie for legal organizations looking to deepen their commitment to equity and justice. Structural racism and other oppression based on gender, ability, class, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, immigration status, and other social identity factors are all crucibles forging the racial and other social inequities that create the consequent downstream legal needs legal advocates tirelessly work to address.

In the time of COVID-19 (or any national emergency/large-scale event), relationship building and communication with organizations and groups in the community are more valuable than ever. How can you ensure you are on the same page as those in the community? Have the ways you communicated with the community partner changed during these times? Do you know if the referral you are giving is to an organization that is no longer able to provide services during this emergency? Is your main point of connection still at the organization? What technologies are they using to reach out to their community? These are the types of questions legal aid organizations must consider. This guide aims to explore these questions by examining the values and strategies that are first needed to build meaningful legal-community partnerships.

Centering a Movement Lawyering Mindset

Community lawyering is commonly seen where lawyers are supporting community-led work for a specific neighborhood or group. Movement lawyering speaks to the broader responsibility lawyers can play to end systemic injustice and is guided by the leadership of those directly impacted by structural oppression. Both center community perspectives and those affected through long-term and accountable relationships.

A movement or community lawyering mindset is based on two concepts: 1) building community power, and 2) centering community perspectives. As articulated by the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, community lawyering can be described as a "process through which advocates contribute their legal knowledge and skills to support initiatives identified by the community and enhance the community's power." Relatedly, the organization Law For Black Lives defines movement lawyering as "taking direction from directly impacted communities and from organizers, as opposed to imposing our leadership or expertise as legal advocates." These concepts are intricately connected, and both aim to build community power.

Adopting a community or movement lawyering mindset requires a paradigm shift from traditional legal approaches where the lawyer is positioned as carrying the solution to a client's problem. Instead, "the client [or impacted group], rather than the lawyer, defines the problem and solution, drives the advocacy, and serves as spokesperson for negotiations and public testimony and appearances." [1] This ensures the client's lived experience and the community stay centered, shifting power away from the lawyer or legal advocate.

The Shriver Center breaks down community lawyering into three core competencies. This guide explicitly focuses on the first: Community Understanding & Relationship Building – as it is the prerequisite to the other core competencies.

Community Understanding & Relationship Building	Issue Identification & Strategy Development	Community-Defined Advocacy Approaches
FIRST Recognizing community strengths. Meet with & learn from community. Ongoing involvement in community.	**THEN** Identify shared concerns. Translate problems to actionable issues. Analyze and develop multi-faceted strategies to achieve community goals,	**AND** Advance legislative & policy advocacy. Create communications & framing, Provide community education. Consider legal strategies.

Once in a relationship, community/movement lawyers facilitate community members' ability to identify their concerns and translate them into actionable issues. Actionable issues are ones that the community can successfully take on in ways that further build relationships, celebrate small and large wins, and foster a desire and ability to increase community power and the scope of their self-determination. As advocacy approaches are developed, community lawyers are then able to contribute a mix of legal and non-legal tools to support community-identified initiatives.

These mindsets are different than traditional attorney-client models often learned from and perpetuated by dominant culture. Even within organizations providing direct and high-volume legal services, a movement

[1] Tawatoa M, Bailey C, Smith G, Kennedy B. Instituting a Race-Conscious Practice in Legal Aid: One Program's Effort. Clear Review J Poverty Law Policy. 2008;42(1-2). https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/thcsj/Instituting_a_RaceConscious_Practice_in_Legal_Aid_One_Progams_Effort.pdf

lawyering mindset can be applied. The table [2] below represents the fundamental differences between a traditional model of lawyering and movement lawyering. These distinctions are also explored in the Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative (REJI) Organizational Race Equity Toolkit.

Clinical Model	Community/Movement Lawyering
▪ Lawyer determines the terms of engagement ▪ Lawyer determines the relevant facts and narrative ▪ Lawyer defines the problem and solution ▪ Lawyer defines success ▪ Lawyer retains power & client dependence	▪ The best solution to any problem necessarily involves those directly impacted ▪ Never do for a client or group what they can do for themselves ▪ Use the law to place the client and community in control of their lives and neighborhood institutions ▪ Race and ethnicity become assets ▪ Power and recognition transferred to the client and community

Even when we are members of the community we are serving or have an affinity toward a community, it is critical that we not ignore the class and education differences present by virtue of being lawyers in a legal program.

Strategies to help minimize class and educational positionality of lawyers in community settings including:

1. Ensuring lawyers are simply members of the "team," letting clients and community groups guide overall strategy yet using the lawyer's legal expertise and skills when a legal strategy is desired.
2. Investing more time spent outside the office to meet clients and community members out in the community to better establish trust and rather than in the office where the client-lawyer power dynamic is often reinforced. This will also bring relevant information and resources *into* the community.
3. Supporting sustainable knowledge, programs, and leadership development within communities most impacted to reduce or eliminate the dependency for ongoing legal services by lawyers and legal advocates (e.g., see Goal 2 of the State Plan for the Coordinated Delivery of Civil Legal Aid to Low-Income People, "Legal Education and Awareness").
4. Following the client and community group's leadership in pursuit of a larger mission, organizing goal, campaign.
5. Inviting clients and community members through interviews and other communication to share their holistic lived experiences (i.e. discussing non-legal needs, topics related to race and racism) to ground lawyering in the perspective of a client).
6. Exploring ways to partner with clients and community groups in strategies to combine community building and legal/administrative advocacy.

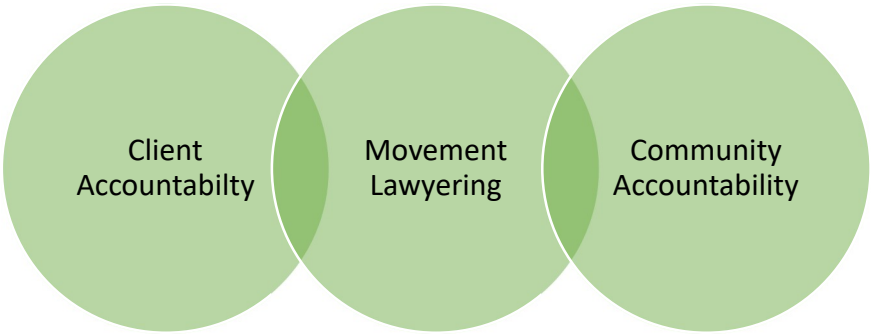
Case studies provide further insight into these community-centered approaches. For instance, the Shriver Center on Poverty Law's "Making the Case for Community Lawyering" shares the work of a legal organization in Washington D.C. aiming toward long-term community impact, with community organizers working

[2] The Law Office of William Kennedy. Community Lawyering: A Pro Active Strategy to Build Power in Communities. 2018 Statewide Legal Advocate Training. October 2018. Presentation. https://advocatetraining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CommunityLawyering.pdf

alongside attorneys to develop a client-led affordable housing campaign to build local community power. In Los Angeles, a movement to legalize street vendors was accomplished by a vendor-led organizing campaign, utilizing the assistance of pro bono lawyers. In another resource on movement lawyering framed as "racial justice lawyering," several case studies are profiled "Louder than Words: Lawyers, Communities, and the Struggle for Justice."

Client Accountability Alongside Community Accountability

When building strong relationships, it is important to understand the distinction between building trust and accountability with clients and building trust and accountability with the community as a whole. The latter is often represented through relationships with community-based groups and organizations. Legal organizations providing direct legal services ensure *Client Accountability* by, for example, ensuring a high quality of service, regular opportunities for client feedback, and effective communication with clients throughout their cases. *Community Accountability* is distinct in that it aims to ensure the legal organization is equitably serving and being responsive to the communities most impacted by their work. Community and client accountability are both critical yet necessitate different considerations. How they connect to one another is best described through movement lawyering strategies, where clients and community members play an active role in guiding the pace and goals of attorneys and legal organizations.



To further elucidate the distinction between client and community accountability, the two lists below highlight what legal organizations may ask when assessing their accountability practices:

Client Accountability

1. Are we providing the most accurate and best available information to the client, given their legal needs?
2. Are we providing the highest quality service we can provide?
3. Are we communicating with clients regularly and promptly during their case?
4. Are we ultimately ensuring their legal needs are met by us or, if not, by a partner?
5. Are we regularly asking for feedback from the community to ensure our client services are shaped by those who access our legal services?
6. Are we responding to and addressing the critical feedback we receive?
7. Are we explaining the way we do things to ensure the client is informed and understands why certain decisions are made?
8. Are we offering opportunities to the client to play an active role in their case?
9. Are we transparent in our information sharing and decision-making so that we can educate clients on our process and build our clients' knowledge of the legal system, for clients interested in understanding?

10. Are we ensuring clients understand when we are or are not taking their case so that clients are not led to believe we are taking their case when we are not? Further, are we making it clear why we cannot accept a case from a client and ensuring the client understands?
11. Are we tracking which clients (e.g. demographics across race/ethnicity, gender, types of cases) we are and are not accepting to better understand who is being served?
12. Are we ensuring those who seek services from us are having their needs meet (i.e., reducing or eliminating our waiting list)?

A theme across *Client* accountability is that the "work" includes reminding clients of the power they have in their own cases and filling any gaps of understanding and knowledge they request on how the system is impacting them. Regardless of the outcome of their case, accountability to the client calls on us to reflect on the ways we are ensuring clients understand their agency, and supporting their self-determination. Even in instances where their case ends with an unwanted outcome, how is our legal organization ensuring clients always feel heard and have a voice? Are we connecting them with local resources to ensure they have other legal needs and non-legal needs met? Are they connected to community groups or other organizations, so they are connected to people in similar situations and able to engage in and build community power? As attorneys and legal advocates, we must do what we can to break the cycle of the clinical model of lawyering and the consequent power dynamics where "lawyers know best." Legal advocates cannot assist clients in every way they need, but with relationships to organizations and groups based in the community, legal advocates can be better.

Community Accountability

1. Given our limited resources, are we serving those who are most in need of legal services and most harmed by poverty, racism, and other forms of structural oppression? Are we reaching clients and communities with different ethnic/racial backgrounds, gender identities, and socioeconomic backgrounds?
2. Are we only "reacting" and changing systems and policies only when the communities we work with are under attack, or are we changing systems even when they are not under attack to build more community power?
3. Are the systemic or policy changes we make helping our clients address legal problems once they are already experiencing them, or are our changes protecting our clients from having legal issues to begin with (i.e., addressing root causes)?
4. Are we in long-term partnerships with social service providers and other local resources to ensure that the non-legal needs of clients and community members (e.g., housing, education, employment, etc.) are also met?
5. Are we in long-term partnerships with other community-based groups and organizations doing similar work to share information, resources, and ultimately serve more people in the impacted community? If so, are these authentic relationships where we share power and allow the community to guide our priorities and work, or are these "one-directional" relationships where we provide information and resources when we want to/are able to?
6. Are we in long-term partnerships with community groups that are "by and for" communities most harmed by structural oppression and most impacted by our work, that are already organizing themselves and building power, or are our partners only other service providers?
7. When we successfully win a case for a client or otherwise conclude working with them, are we attempting to connect them with other people, community groups, or other resources for them to be able to organize and build power and relationships within their own communities? Similarly, are we making this attempt even when we cannot take a client's case?

8. Are we explaining the way we do things transparently to ensure the broader community - including other legal service providers, social service providers, and community-based groups - is informed and understands why certain decisions that will affect them are made?

A theme across these *Community* accountability questions is that the "work" ultimately is guided by groups and organizations that are most impacted by our programs and the unjust systems in which the legal aid community is entrenched.

Community accountability calls on us to reflect on what the future may look like in 5, or even 10, years:

- Will affected communities be able to tell us that they are thriving?
- Will they be able to say we were integral in helping them meet the goals that they identified?
- Will our legal organization be addressing the same cases and fighting the same battles?
- How can we maintain a long-term outlook and lasting community-legal partnerships?

Upstream Thinking & Structural Shifts

One paradigm inherent in building community accountability – rather than only client accountability – is the idea of "upstream" thinking. Explored in this video, upstream thinking tells us to make change focused on prevention (e.g., transformation, structural change) rather than downstream thinking addressing immediate need (e.g., direct services, food banks). Building community accountability may feel more 'upstream' (e.g., change is slower yet address root causes) compared to the more common client accountability practices of legal organizations. Given most Alliance for Equal Justice organizations directly support individual clients, it is more common for legal organizations to prioritize client accountability questions and ensure high-quality client services. Yet a culture shift towards upstream thinking, even for direct service organizations, brings a vital perspective for building long-term legal-community partnerships. When focusing on either kind of accountability, it is helpful to remember that it is not "either/or" but instead "all/and."

For direct service organizations, an upstream approach may necessitate adopting a variety of strategies to support the organization and its staff in building community accountability. For example, in recent years, legal organizations have expanded capacity for relationships and partnerships with community partners by **hiring social workers, community organizers, or other staff focused directly on community outreach and relationship-building**. Colectiva Legal del Pueblo, Northwest Justice Project, TeamChild, Eastside Legal Assistance Program, and Columbia Legal Services have all designated community outreach or organizer positions. The Immigrant Legal Resource Center has a resource entitled "Beyond Traditional Lawyering" that spotlights additional case studies on client-centered lawyering practices for legal organizations.

Relatedly, there are practices those in positional authority can enact and encourage to support staff and their organizations to build relationships in the community.

Best Practices to Promote a Culture of Relationship-Building with Community:

- Create an expectation that staff spends some time out of the office and in the community each week, disrupting power dynamics that presume community members must come to the office to build relationships.
- Examine time spent and quality of relationships built with the community as part of performance evaluations,
- Use staff meetings to report on community engagement progress so that all staff are aware of efforts and have opportunities to be involved, and

- Center community relationship-building within the organization's overall goals and priorities.[3]
- Support your lawyers' capacity for engaging in crucial movement lawyering strategies – including enhanced self-awareness, an examination of the traditional lawyer-client relationship; a sharpened analysis of race, class, and power; and an understanding of how social change occurs. These all support an environment that disrupts the status quo and allow for transformational change to occur. See Rebellious Reflection: Supporting Community Law Practice for more details.

But What About My Clients?

Adopting an upstream mindset does not mean that advocates must abandon their commitment to providing high-quality legal services. Advocates must still be accountable to their clients and operate within the guidelines of their individual and organizational roles. That said, front-line advocates play a critical role in broader work to end poverty, racism, and oppression.

Here are a few questions to consider:

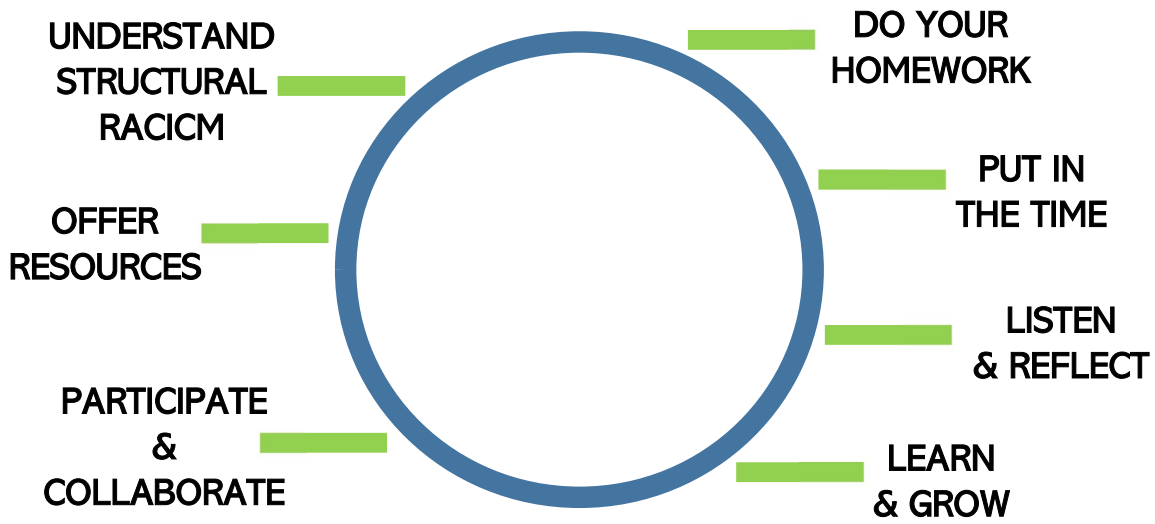
- As someone working closely with individual clients, are you aware of their holistic needs and connecting them with community support and organizing/ relationship-building/power-building opportunities (when available)?
- Are there community-identified priorities, patterns, and/or trends that you can address directly, even if it means changing established priorities or practices within your organization? If not, can you share these priorities, patterns, and/or trends with other teams or partners that may be able to address these issues through systemic advocacy or other approaches?
- To what extent are you incorporating representation of related groups and organizations into your own organization's work, to the extent that it is permissible? For instance, Standard 7.16 from the ABA's Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid notes that, "Many of the legal needs of low-income communities can be addressed effectively by a practitioner assisting groups and organizations that are made up of persons who are eligible for the provider's services or seek to respond to the needs of the communities served by the provider. Representation of groups and organizations is often a central component of strategies to respond to the needs of low-income communities. Ongoing interaction with community organizations can also serve as an important source of information about needs in the community that help guide a provider's strategic planning efforts."
- Are you encouraging your organization to invest in community relationship-building and direct its limited resources toward the types of cases and advocacy that benefit those who are most marginalized and harmed by systemic oppression?

[3] The Law Office of William Kennedy. Community Lawyering: A Pro-Active Strategy to Build Power in Communities. 2018 Statewide Legal Advocate Training. October 2018. Presentation. https://advocatetraining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CommunityLawyering.pdf

Community Partnership-Building: What to Know & How to Prepare

Circular Practice of Building Community Trust and Accountability

Given this guide's focus on community understanding & relationship building, we must explore the dynamic process of trust-building. A constant and tireless truth is that those with the experience of oppression most acutely know how they are experiencing harm and what needs to change. Community partnerships provide invaluable insight into understanding the impacts of oppression and how to build power in community. But how can those partnerships be built? There is no checklist to follow. It is an iterative and circular process focused on building trust. Thus, a *Circular Practice* is helpful to create space for the work to evolve naturally, for human relationships to develop, and for new information to be learned. .



- ***Do Your Homework –*** Identify and gather information on the history of the issues and local community organizing work. Impacted community members in the community who are most impacted are likely already working on that issue through grassroots organizing and building community power. Staff and volunteers of your organizations may already have relationships and resources you can start with to further gather information through formal and informal strategies. These strategies may include talking with community members, collecting demographic data that is disaggregated by race, gender, nationality, and other social groupings; community asset mapping, GIS mapping, etc.). If there are not already mobilized groups, look for places where community members already gather or go to for information and support.

- ***Put in the Time*** – Make a commitment to consistently attending meetings and events convened by the communities you seek to build relationships with. This could be meetings hosted by community-based organizations, coalitions, or organizing groups. Leaving the office to be in the community allows for trust and relationship-building. Use this time to get to know community members as people, not as clients. Let them get to know you as a person, not as a lawyer with an agenda. Do not center the work of your organization or job titles when meeting with community members. Without trusting relationships, any collaborative and accountable partnership will be difficult to create, especially given the challenges lawyers, legal advocates, and others representing legal organizations face in overcoming power dynamics and mistrust

community members may have for those working within the law and justice systems. Note that community meetings are often in the evening. Allow staff to use work time to go to evening events, including fundraisers.

- ***Listen & Reflect –*** Take the time to think critically and reflect on what you hear from others. Do not plan on listening to speak, but *listening to understand* (i.e., avoid being a predatory listener). Community members do not expect or want institutional partners to do their work for them. Often, communities have already been organizing on an issue that only recently became a priority for you or your organization, so there is much to catch up on. Listen and reflect with the people you are sharing space with to deepen your understanding and knowledge of history. In other words, resist the urge to share what you feel "the community may not know" and instead reflect on what you do not know.

- ***Learn & Grow –*** Take what you have heard and turn it into action. Shift your thinking and learn about community-driven solutions. Use your learning to shift power from law and justice system partners back to the community. Reflect on goals articulated by others and what role you and your organization might play to support the vision set by the community. Through the relationships you are building, you will better understand the community's strengths and learn about how institutions have intentionally and unintentionally undermined community-led efforts. You may be uncomfortable at times, yet remember growth comes with discomfort, and growth is much more comfortable with humility.

- ***Participate & Collaborate –*** Engage with your community network regularly and follow the leadership of the community. Legal strategies are not the solution to every problem and often can be ways attorneys unintentionally maintain their power. With trusting relationships guiding your approach, do offer relevant and constructive insights from your perspective working within the law and justice system, yet understand they may be rejected. In some instances, community members may yield their power to you, assuming that lawyers "know best." Resist the temptation to center yourself and instead find ways to facilitate discussion that invites additional voices into the conversation.

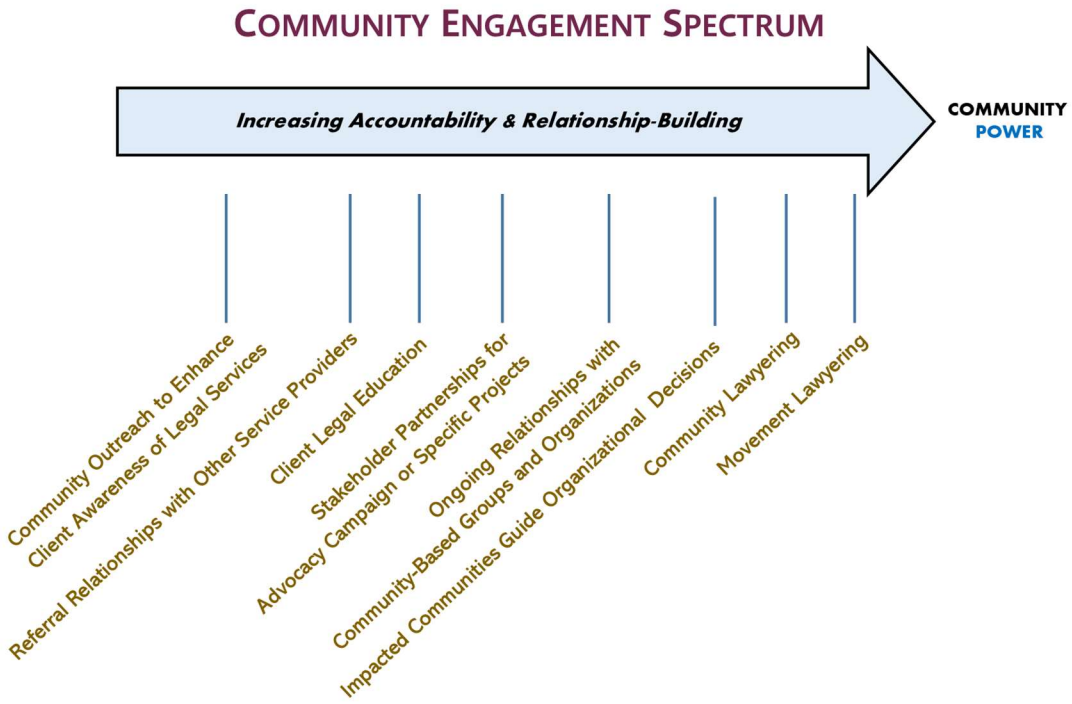
- ***Understand Structural Racism –*** Equitably participate and collaborate in conversations that promote a greater understanding of racism, the racialization of the law and justice system, and the ways poverty and racism intersect. If you feel you need more education on structural racism, make time to learn more.

- ***Offer Resources –*** Intentionally shift capital (and power) towards community-led work. With relationships in place, seek ways to be responsive and supportive of community organizing and other grassroots community efforts. Remember, folks affected by racialized and oppressive systems are closest to the problems impacting their lives and know best what needs to change. Devoting resources to community-led efforts is an effective and equitable approach to building legal-community partnerships. Be careful not to impose your resources or work products as the "answer." Instead, offer your resources if it is helpful. For example, if you have gathered data and conducted any research as an organization, offer this information to the community (if invited to do so) to inform their efforts.

Levels of Community Engagement

In the visual below, we offer examples of common community engagement approaches along a spectrum that considers the extent to which the approach supports power being built and maintained in communities most impacted by structural injustice. On the left-hand side, approaches are more one-directional. As we move along the spectrum, we see strategies that invite deeper and more lasting relationships and practices

for ensuring community accountability. *All* approaches are needed and valued, but resource and capacity constraints and historical funding and political attacks have made it challenging to re-imagine and invest in other ways of knowing and being in a relationship.



Key Tenets for Building Community Partnerships

As part of ongoing learning and circular practice of building trust and accountability, *Principles for Building Community Partnerships* can be helpful in providing guidance on how organizations can build meaningful community partnerships informed by societal systems of oppression and organizational dynamics.

- ***There is No 'One Size Fits All.'*** It is tempting to implement an approach that worked in one place and apply it to another. However, organizations need to adapt to the needs and preferences of the specific communities being engaged. Not doing so is more likely to lead to ineffective and inequitable efforts.

- ***Accountability is Relational.*** Community partnership-building must be relational and based on trust. Engagements of client or community partners must be built on top of relationships already established in the community with the goal of creating deeper and more accountable relationships. If a relationship does not already exist, an intentional and well-thought-out effort must be made to build those relationships with the goal of first building trust before an ask is made of the community to avoid "transactional" interactions.

- ***Compounding Oppression is Constant.*** Intersectionality and compounding bias amplify harm and are always at play within our society. Partnership-building does not operate independently from systemic injustice and oppression. Any effort to collaborate with the community must consider and invite an understanding of systemic bias based on various social categories such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, legal status, and other social factors.

- ***Frontline Workers' Knowledge and Clients' Lived Experience are Invaluable.*** Staff with on-the-ground experience have critical information and guidance to offer to the

community partnership-building process. Existing and prospective clients have the first-hand experience of structural oppression and are closest to the problem, and the solution thus will have the best understanding of what they need to ultimately be happy, healthy, and safe. The lived experiences of staff and community members should be centered as early and regularly as possible with any effort to collaborate with the community.

- ***History Provides Context*.** Every community has a history, and legal organizations are a part of a larger justice system that has and currently operates in inequitable ways. Awareness of this history allows for an informed approach to accountable community partnerships. The community, particularly those most impacted by structural oppression, have extensive experience interacting with those systems and the history of the ways societal systems in the US have created structural oppression.

- ***Stay Human.*** When engaging, collaborating, and building relationships with community partners, be a human being first. Although we cannot fully separate ourselves from our profession as representatives of the organization, institution, and systems we are a part of, we must strive to find our collective humanity with others as we build meaningful relationships. This means resisting perfectionism and being prepared to make mistakes despite best intentions. Staying human calls for discomfort and having potentially difficult conversations as issues arise, yet these are moments for growth and building trust.

Best Practices for Equitable Programming & Services

If your organization is planning and designing programs, services, or events with the hope members of the community will participate, ensuring equitable participation is a critical responsibility. The best way to ensure what you are planning will meaningfully allow others to participate is to design the program or event **with** the community. If community members do agree to collaborate on design with you, find a mutually agreed-upon way to compensate them for their time.

With any approach, consider these best practices to ensure programs and services are carried out in ways that eliminate common barriers that keep community members from engaging with you:

↳ **Schedule Events Equitably.** Confirm that events are scheduled at times and locations that allow community members to participate. This often means not scheduling events during work hours or at difficult locations inaccessible by public transit or not ADA-friendly. Schedule events in familiar spaces to the community and provide food and drinks at events, particularly during dinner hours. If you are not sure where and when would be best, ask the community.

↳ **Ensure a Variety of Ways for Community Engagement.** Because community members differ in their schedules and accessibility needs around transportation and technology, providing a variety of ways to engage allows greater accessibility for a diverse community to engage with you. For example, if you're hoping to gain community input, consider how, for example, an in-person focus group or interviews are scheduled at fixed times can be limited. Online surveys and/or phone options will provide flexibility in schedule. Whatever you might plan, provide different times of the day and ways to engage to accommodate a variety of schedules.

↳ **Recognize Power Dynamics.** In almost every space, particular power dynamics are at play, which is particularly true between attorneys and community members or their clients. If you are an attorney in a community space, identify ways you are unintentionally inflating your importance with presumed or perceived knowledge or experience. Instead, remember that although the technical training and expertise you do have is valuable, it does not supersede the client's lived experiences or the community. In a community space, pay attention to the number of times attorneys and legal providers are speaking

versus those in the community. Be authentic and be respectful. If you are organizing a community input session, be aware of the number of staff that are attending. You do not want too many attorneys in comparison to the number of community members.

- **Compensate People for Their Time.** Asking community members to share their story, experience, feedback, and/or otherwise participate in a specific organizational effort without some form of compensation maintains institutional power dynamics when it should be a mutually beneficial relationship. Sometimes financial compensation is critical to allow community members to spend their time with you. Compensation can be reflected in a per hour rate, flat rate, or gift cards. If you are not sure what the best type of compensation might be, ask the participants.

- **Serve Delicious Food.** Gathering around food is a cultural norm shared across many communities. Serving delicious food from local restaurants owned by Black, Indigenous, and people of color is a way of supporting the community and a natural human way of connecting. Breaking bread together is a way of breaking down barriers and cultivating a sense of being a part of a larger community. If it is an evening event, consider serving hot food, even it is a little messy.

- **Provide Childcare.** Providing childcare options allows for parents to get involved who might otherwise not be able to participate due to financial reasons or not being able to find someone to babysit. Expecting people to participate and leave their lives at home is not realistic and will undermine equitable participation and planning of your efforts.

- **Provide Transportation & Consider Proximity to Public and Accessible Transportation.** When choosing a venue, consider proximity and accessibility. Providing transportation or travel stipends for those without access to cars or funds for public transit allows you to address the ways in which the transportation system creates barriers for people to live their lives as they would like.

- **Use Interpreters & Translate Materials.** Language access is a persistent barrier to meaningfully accessing services, particularly legal services. Offer interpreter services for the language(s) spoken by the community, learn about available services used within the community, and invest resources to ensure your organization can effectively work alongside interpreters to eliminate any language-related barriers. When using an interpreter, do not communicate directly with the interpreter; instead, look at and talk directly to the person you are speaking with. This will allow you to better connect with them and understand what they are saying through their body language. Here's one video on how to effectively use interpreters.

- **Keep the Community Informed.** Ensure any materials and findings that involve the community and what they have shared with you come back to the community. For example, if a report was written that used information shared with you by a community partner, share a copy with them. If you are in the middle of an ongoing project that involves the community, ensure you are providing updates. Sometimes you may have no updates. However, staying in communication with community members demonstrates that you are prioritizing building relationships, not just the outcomes of the project.

- **Share Data.** Provide access to and answer questions about any data collected from the community from surveys or other research purposes. This should be done before and after publishing data with ongoing dialogue about how the community might like to use this new information.

- **Actively Address Feedback from the Community.** To ensure your work is responsive and dynamic to the community you are serving, ensure that internal infrastructure is in place to both documents, and address feedback provided by the community. Soliciting feedback formally and informally after offering services, programming, or events is particularly valuable. As an organization, regularly reflect on questions such as: What does your organization do with feedback received from the community? How do

you address the feedback? If you did nothing with the feedback, why? How can you ensure community feedback in the future is heard, incorporated, and responded to?

- **Be Mindful of Adding More Events and Activities**. Few people have the bandwidth to participate in additional programs or events given work and family schedules. If you are seeking information or would like to offer programs or services, identify existing partners and learn about events and resources already present within the community where it might be appropriate for you to either join or collaborate on with those partners. Can you position yourself where the community already is in a meaningful and helpful (and not exploitative) way rather than adding new obligations or events?

- **Plan Ahead Yet Be Flexible.** Meaningful community involvement is both a time and resource-intensive process and often takes more time and resources than anticipated. If you are preparing for community input to inform your programs, services, events, strategic planning, or other organizational processes, plan extra time and extra resources for the time needed to include community participation in an equitable way. This includes thinking about information the community may need before an event takes place to make the best use of resources and minimize the burden on the community. Questions to consider when planning are: What will help community members feel comfortable and confident going into this event? Is there information they can review in advance? How can we be ready to deviate from the agenda if there is energy during the discussion towards other related topics? Lastly, keep in mind that meetings with the intention for community members to attend and participate should be made at least 1-2 weeks in advance.

- **Commit to Ongoing Learning about Intercultural Competency and Anti-Racist Practices.** As mentioned earlier in our *Circular Practice of Building Trust & Accountability*, equitably engaging with community partners requires a demonstrated commitment learn about and practice anti-racism. To learn about anti-racism practices is also about sharing power and practicing cultural humility, especially in response to the ways white supremacy culture operates and creates a sense of exclusion onto others. Your work is to understand these dominant culture dynamics and eliminate their ability to influence you and others in understanding and working together. Along with the REJI Toolkit and the many resources that it provides, here are a few more documents to help support your development of cultural humility and anti-racist practices:
    - White Dominant Culture & Something Different Worksheet (Adaptation of Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones' White Supremacy Culture article by Partners for Collaborative Change, for the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment)
    - Five Practices for Breakout Innovation (Eastside for All)
    - Navigating the Cultural Minefield (Harvard Business Review)
    - Cultural Humility Blog with Examples (Erin Meyer)

For more on building community accountability, explore the Washington Race Equity & Justice (REJI) and its collection of resources focused on organizational development and race equity, including the REJI Toolkit.

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