Storytelling:
Utilizing Varying Methods of Data Collection to Effectively Communicate Needs.

Misinformation and generic messaging are often amplified over more relevant voices, causing increasing difficulty in advancing health equity and addressing social determinants of health as they relate to COVID-19 health inequities among the focus populations of this grant. **This session confronted the ways in which "how" we interpret and utilize data can either uplift or harm the communities we serve. We explored the links between authentic community engagement and sustaining evidence-informed, nimble, and effective programming. Panelists shared practical strategies to help you amplify the correct voices.**

What is authentic community engagement and storytelling?

- Indigenous public health praxis in community engagement is a movement that holds reverence for and centers the experiences of the community and the relationship to their land, environment, and other beings. It underscores the importance of community knowledge, wisdom, and storytelling that allows communities to lead, center, and guide work and research in public health.

- Storytelling places value and emphasis on the traditional, ecological, and cultural knowledge that communities hold to inform research, practice, and implementation. In the community, "our stories are our theory."

- Authentic community engagement and storytelling require approval from respected leaders to engage with members of the community.

- Organizations must ensure mutual benefit and respect for both sides in community interactions when exchanging knowledge, information, and sharing partnerships.

Why is authentic community engagement and storytelling important?

- Indigenous public health praxis empowers the community to identify who they are, the obstacles they experience, the structures and systems influencing their lives, and their sources of healing and wellness.

- Indigenous public health praxis confronts inequities by going beyond existing pathologies and reframing issues in a way that is solution-generative and strengths-based.

- Western models of health impacts and social determinants do not have a place for social determinants that are more relevant for Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC) such as community connectedness that comes from sharing traditional practices or the impacts of colonialism and related policies and practices.

- Storytelling contributes to healing, health, and well-being by revering community knowledge and wisdom. This framework is often more effective at improving health equity when compared to standard practices in public health because it gets at the root of the issue for communities.

How can organizations best integrate and practice authentic community engagement and storytelling in their work?

- Weave Indigenous public health praxis into work to establish accountability and respect between researchers and BIPOC communities when collecting, interpreting, and putting stories into action.

- Practice authentic community engagement and storytelling by implementing the art of storytelling. Pass on lessons to the next generation of public health researchers in the field. Acknowledge that Indigenous and BIPOC knowledge is evidence-based and valuable to inform public health research, implementation, and practice.

- Identify community health leaders who have identified their own ways of influencing health within their communities. This creates more autonomy for BIPOC people who have historically not had this opportunity.

- Focus on indigenizing as opposed to decolonizing current public health practices. Organizations should not focus solely on the colonization of people that occurred in the past but instead create alternative frameworks and practices for BIPOC communities that are solution-generative and strengths-based.

Resources to learn from:

The below resources may be helpful starting points for health departments, but it is important to note that every community is different, so these resources may need to be adapted.

Community Engagement of African Americans in the Era of COVID-19: Considerations, Challenges, Implications, and Recommendations for Public Health

An article that compares community health workers (CHWs) in Indiana and Texas based on the results of two research studies in order to 1) investigate the unique role of CHWs and their Spanish-speaking counterparts, promotores de salud, in rural communities and 2) understand how their advocacy efforts represent a central form of caregiving.

Cultural Sources of Strength and Resilience: A Case Study of Holistic Wellness Boxes for COVID-19 Response in Indigenous Communities

A case study that describes the pandemic response of Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health as they coordinated with community members to identify contents to be collected and distributed in the form of a care box to members in the local Indigenous community.

Assessing Meaningful Community Engagement: A Conceptual Model to Advance Health Equity through Transformed Systems for Health

A report that highlights an authentic community-academic partnership within the landscape of COVID-19 used to address structural changes necessary for the reduction of existing and forthcoming health inequities.

Growing from Our Roots: Strategies for Developing Culturally Grounded Health Promotion Interventions in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Communities

A report that identifies strategies and approaches for creating culturally resonant health promotion interventions. These interventions were created in partnership with Native communities.

Strengthening Digital Health Community Capacity in Navajo Communities to Help Counter the COVID-19 Pandemic

An article that outlines interventions both to expand telemedicine services in Navajo communities and to blend telemedicine with culturally reflective education and health prevention interventions.

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