

Closing the Gap - Homelessness to Housing
Stakeholder Engagement & Advancing Equity

Gordon Levine: Thank you very much and thank you all for joining us for the first webinar in this five-part webinar series, Closing the Gap - Homelessness to Housing. My name is Gordon Levine. My pronouns are he and him. I am white and Jewish and I am a lead homeless services specialist with ICF. I'd like to invite my co-presenter, Mike, to introduce himself now.

Michael Thomas: Thank you, Gordon. My name is Michael Thomas. My pronouns are he and him. I am white and I am also a lead homeless services specialist with ICF. So, I'm happy to be here with you today.

Gordon Levine: All right. Thanks, Mike. During this series, we will be providing guidance on best practices and strategies and stakeholder engagement for homeless services systems. We will cover topics designed to help communities establish equitable and effective homelessness responses through meaningful collaboration, resource coordination, and efficient services delivery.

Today's session, Stakeholder Engagement and Advancing Equity, will focus on building meaningful relationships and collaborations with the people and populations who are frequently excluded from the decision-making processes of homeless services systems. Go ahead and put us over to the next slide.

Our agenda for today really takes us through four topics: inclusive stakeholder engagement, incorporating people with lived experience, advancing equity with sub foci on several populations that are significant or prominent in many of our communities. A section on considerations for rural communities and tribal nations, and finally, a Q&A.

Our first section is going to be on inclusive stakeholder engagement. So inclusive stakeholder engagement means seeking out and incorporating the voices of people who are most impacted yet historically excluded from decisions about how that system operates. And when we say historically included, we're pointing both to the history of exclusion, but also to exclusion that is ongoing. Inclusive stakeholder engagement is a process that begins with recognizing the people who have been excluded from planning and decision making.

It requires active participation from your existing leaders and stakeholders and it produces powerful and transformative results, but it usually doesn't produce those results right away. This is a process and it's one thing we'll be reiterating throughout this webinar series. None of this is something that happens overnight. Everything here is something that requires time, investment, dedication, commitment, and a continual renewal of the process. And as it says at the bottom, it needs to be continuous and ongoing.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement requires assessing your system service providers and participants to identify who has been excluded from the table, who's missing, who is absent, who has been excluded, and who needs to be included.

Identifying stakeholders and right-sizing your opportunities. Inclusive stakeholder engagement is not one-size-fits-all and that's another thing that we're going to be hitting on several times today.

Systems should be tailoring their opportunities to their stakeholders, both at the population and at the individual stakeholder level and systems need to afford stakeholders space and resources to grow and to participation. Fundamentally, stakeholders who are not at the table are very unlikely to come to the table equipped and prepared to contribute in the same way as people who have been at the table for a long period of time.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement requires each system to identify specifically the people it has excluded from participation. Again, we're talking about both populations and people. Systems cannot advance without understanding their local patterns of marginalization and each community does have its own, not necessarily unique, but specific pattern of marginalization that requires assessment to understand.

Systems shouldn't make assumptions about a stakeholders' interests and capacities. And again, we're talking about individual people here. Instead, the system should work directly with each stakeholder to determine together how to create the most meaningful engagement opportunities for that stakeholder and fundamentally that requires active listening. One of the most challenging things in incorporating new stakeholders is unlearning the assumptions that many of us make about what a given stakeholder might be interested in or capable of.

Unlearning those assumptions and proactively soliciting what a stakeholder's interested in is one of the most powerful tools in your toolkit. Finally, most new stakeholders as I said, are not prepared to immediately assume, it says certain roles, but many roles even if those roles meet their interests.

Helping stakeholders expand their capacity to engage and contribute is a critical part of inclusive stakeholder engagement and that's both about creating a culture of engagement and also about creating formal and specific training tailored to the individual to equip them to the roles that they're interested in undertaking.

Essential considerations about inclusive stakeholder engagement. As we said, you need to identify the people who have been excluded. Each system does have its unique pattern of system users, contributors and external partners and inclusive stakeholder engagement begins with looking deeply and honestly to see who has been excluded from planning and decision-making.

You need to foster relationships. And so what we mean by that is creating a collaborative environment for incoming stakeholders to participate in planning and decision-making processes. It means centering and placing the highest value on their voices and perspectives and it means creating a situation in which both the system and the individual person are benefiting mutually from the relationship.

It requires you to shift your approach, which means working to improve accessibility for incoming stakeholders at the system level and at the leadership level, centering the needs of incoming stakeholders and determining which changes to make. We're going to talk about that more on the next slide.

Keeping in mind that it is a marathon, not a sprint. There's this idea or this I think aspirational hope that inclusivity is a state that you can achieve, right? That we have transformed our system and our system is now inclusive and it's simply not real. Inclusivity is a practice that needs to be continually implemented, reviewed, revised and then re-implemented. It's not something that is a goal you can achieve. It's a process that you continually implement.

As I said, you need to grow your stakeholders. It's very rare to find a perfect fit stakeholder who isn't already at the table who can slot into the role that they're interested in playing. Instead, it's a system. You need to create space and provide resources for your incoming stakeholders to grow into their roles and also to uplift the impact of their work so that stakeholders can see the impacts of what they're doing as they're growing into their roles.

Finally, you need to prepare for imperfection. What we mean by that is that your attempts to be inclusive will not always be successful and that the definition of success is slippery, elusive and complex. You need to plan to have setbacks and that plan needs to include how to stabilize and strengthen the personal or organizational relationships that could be strained by that experience. I would also add fundamentally that a lack of success now doesn't mean that you're not going to succeed later.

It doesn't mean you should stop trying. What it means is that you should keep trying and identify setbacks both as an opportunity to identify what isn't working yet, but also as a signal that there is an opportunity to move forward. It's rare to find a setback that is a closed door. It's common to find a setback that is an indication that you need to shift your approach, shift your thinking, or change the way that you are engaging with your stakeholders.

Finally, a spotlight on shifting your approach. This really requires recognizing that new stakeholders frequently require both on ramps and ongoing accommodations. Advancing equity requires, as I said, creating space for new stakeholders to participate and feel success, which usually includes both adjusting your existing approaches and providing education on the key processes and systems and knowledge areas that are relevant to your community.

And some of those existing approaches that you're going to want to shift and the reason we call these out, there are many approaches you could shift, but these are ones that are very common across all populations and all communities. Looking at your meeting times and places and seeing if they are genuinely accessible to your new stakeholders and if they aren't, shifting those meeting times and places to accommodate the folks who are least able to access them rather than prioritizing your existing leadership and stakeholders.

Assessing your pre-existing deadlines and accessing your pre-existing deadlines without a catch-up period for stakeholders and saying what level of flexibility is required to ensure that our incoming stakeholders are able to fulfill their role and adequately and equally and equitably participate and if that requires us to shift our deadlines or other practices, to make sure that they have plenty of time for that on ramp that we discussed.

Also, we should note that failing to provide these accommodations can really break the trust of your new incoming stakeholders, setback your relationships and reduce or even eliminate the

engagement from those stakeholders that you are attempting in partnership to move past patterns of marginalization and exclusion. This is a huge deal. It's difficult to provide more than what we've already said on that, because it is so specific to the individual person and to the population.

But really at the end of the day, bringing on new stakeholders is about developing relationships. Relationships are built on trust and it sounds like a cliché because it is a cliché but it's also a fundamental truth. What you are doing is building trust with people who have been marginalized, which requires active effort from your current leaders, and from your system. Shifting your approach also requires you to adjust your where and your when.

As we said, consider shifting your meeting locations, identify neutral sites or solicit sites chosen by your new stakeholders and it's not necessarily about doing that always and it's not about doing it forever. But using that as an onboarding tool, and a tangible demonstration of your systems' openness to change can help build that trust while also creating a real and practical way to bring new stakeholders on board, on board them, and retain them. In addition, as we said, consider shifting meeting times to accommodate your new stakeholders.

Your existing meeting times likely prioritize your existing stakeholders and giving new stakeholders a strong voice in shifting those meeting times can remove a really significant barrier to participation and we're going to touch on this later. But this is especially when we talk about people who are not already full time engaged and homeless services response work, like many of us are, have other commitments during the day.

The meetings that currently exists probably prioritize our work schedules and de-prioritize the input of people who would otherwise need to take time out from their other jobs or from their other commitments to attend. And so recognizing that and refitting the way meetings happen, again not necessarily always, but certainly for now can be a powerful tool toward incorporating new stakeholders.

Finally, you need to assume that your new stakeholders will need time and education to become fully invested. They're going to need time to learn the system and its processes and also the information and skills they need to participate in the ways that they find most meaningful. But more than that, having a stakeholder come to the table from a place of marginalization and assuming they know where they're going to feel most meaningfully engaged is a fallacy because one of the elements of marginalization is a lack of insight into what the system is, how it operates, and how a person might contribute or meaningfully engage it.

And so creating space for people to onboard and recognizing that their perspectives and desires and needs might change over time, is an important part of building that trust, but also of helping your new stakeholders find their ideal place and contributing to your systems decision-making, and oversight processes.

Lastly, creating that time and working with each of your new stakeholders to identify how long, and what training and education assistance they need is a critical part of retaining new stakeholders and helping them grow toward meaningful engagement. And the key element there is, when we say working with, what we really mean is listening to your new stakeholders,

because ultimately, they're going to be the ones to tell you how long they need and what they need.

And if you make those decisions for your new stakeholders, you will inevitably find a mismatch between what your assumption is and what the actual need is. I'll go ahead and turn it over to Mike.

Michael Thomas: All right. Thank you, Gordon. So, we've been talking a lot about engaging stakeholders in the introduction. One of the most important stakeholder groups is people with lived experience and expertise of homelessness and it's critical -- it's critical aspect to involve them when you are trying to create a truly inclusive homeless response system. So, we're going to talk a little more about that now.

In order to level set here at the beginning of this part of the conversation, just a couple of definitions. So, when we say lived experience and expertise, that means personal knowledge learned through direct firsthand involvement in a situation or circumstance and that includes the associated skills and social awareness that comes with that.

People with lived experience and expertise of homelessness are people who are, or have been, directly impacted by homelessness either by experiencing homelessness themselves or experiencing its impacts in their close communities or backgrounds. So, just keep those definitions in mind as we move through this section.

So, engagement with people with lived experience must be authentic and meaningful in order to be effective and equitable. Authentic meaningful engagement means including people with lived experience in decision-making, including policy, funding, program design, and implementation. And meaningful engagement is intentional and ideally provides opportunities for people with lived experience and expertise to substantively impact decision-making and outcomes.

It features of people with lived experience and expertise from the beginning of a new project, genuine openness to new perspectives and insights and appropriate compensation for efforts contributed by people with lived experience.

Okay. So, meaningful engagement creates benefits both for people with lived experience and for homeless services systems. So, some benefits that it create for people with lived experience, it includes -- it creates space for people with lived experience to realize their own power, personal growth and leadership development. It increases public understanding of and compassion for homelessness, which helps shape a safer and more affirming community for people with lived experience.

And it improves self-esteem and morale and alleviates depression resulting from the trauma of homelessness, and the effects of multi-generational impacts of systemic and institutional oppression. So here, we're thinking about things like systemic racism, sexism, ableism, and other things. For homeless services systems the benefits include ensuring homeless service systems incorporate the perspectives of the people that they are actually serving and then they can tailor the system to more successfully connect with people who are often considered hard-to-reach.

So, we think about like the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. When you have feedback from them, you can tailor your system to reach them better. And then finally it allows the system to build policies, procedures and practices that reflect the needs of people with lived experience, which flows from what I just said.

So, some considerations to keep in mind for meaningful engagement. The first one I'm going to touch on here is lead with equity. And that means understand who is accessing the homeless services system, understand who has been historically excluded from planning and decision-making and then figure out how to include them.

That's going to look different from community to community. So, that's why, you know, at the end I'm just saying figure out without giving a ton of detail because that process is going to be different from place to place. But I, you know, it really just means knowing who you need to work to include and finding a way to do that.

Secondly become trauma informed. So, that means understand racial trauma and racial disparities in your homeless response system and then institute a team to develop core beliefs and goals and then ensure that policies and procedures uphold those values. Third, seize control. This is a really big one and it's one that some communities have trouble with because, you know, COCs involve governance, structures and committees and things like that.

But you need to be prepared to give up some control and also to get uncomfortable, because these conversations can be uncomfortable, but you need to recognize historical missteps that may have marginalized people with lived experience and you need to recognize those so that you can then work towards rectifying them. And then focus on empowerment. This flows from the seize control point.

So, if your seizing some control from the traditional power structure, then you want to focus on empowering people with lived experience to directly affect the system by giving them some of that authority. And then you want to equip and compensate. So, make sure that people with lived experience have the tools that they need for equitable participation so we're thinking about compensating them for time and things like that but then also things that they need to participate must be provided.

So, we're talking about Wi-Fi access, transportation, lodging, things of that nature that could be barriers to participation. And then finally, when we think about compensation, compensate people fairly for their time and experience. They should be compensated in a manner similar to what anyone else would receive for participation through whatever source they might receive it.

And then finally on the slide, be introspective. Identify how implicit racial bias may have caused harm within your system and then work to repair that harm and grow beyond it. Meaningful engagement can be difficult and it requires a dedicated effort to overcome challenges that can come along with it. So some of those might include that people with lived experience may have barriers to consistent participation. They might not have access to transportation or technology, like we touched on before, access to funding for travel. So that can be a barrier that must be

addressed. People with lived experience tend to have higher rates of stress, trauma, sleep deprivation and behavioral health concerns and may have varying behavior or communication styles that don't adhere to what might be thought of as professional norms.

So it's important to kind of look beyond that and listen to what they are saying. People with lived experience who have been historically marginalized or stigmatized may be resistant to participating in any type of feedback or governance activities due to previous negative experiences regarding people hearing their voices and respecting them.

So these are all challenges that need to be analyzed and addressed in your local strategy to meaningfully engage people with lived experience. It's another thing where this is going to look different from place to place and community to community, but they're all important points to think about as you move towards being more inclusive.

So continuum of care and emergency solutions grant programs do have requirements for governing boards and generally speaking, it requires one person with lived experience to be included. And then you know if you're in a community with the youth homelessness demonstration program that requires significantly greater participation specifically of youth with lived experience of homelessness by the Youth Action Board.

And we've learned a lot from that on how to be inclusive of people with lived experience. Meaningful representation requires going beyond those minimums. So, I mentioned before that minimum of one person on a governing board. Meaningful representation has to go beyond that. It means soliciting input, excuse me, when you solicit input from one person, you run a very high risk of tokenizing that person. So what can happen is you have the one person with lived experience.

A policy is developed with the group. They may or may not have significant input and then the policy is put in front of them and it's just sort of, "Hey what's your feedback?" You do not want to tokenize people with lived experience in that way. It needs to be a more meaningful and inclusive engagement.

Prioritize developing give-and-take relationships with multiple people with lived experience. Prioritize empowering people with lived experience to directly affect policy and implementation and create growth and leadership opportunities tailored to each person's needs. As I said before, Youth Action Boards and then there are other innovative structures out there.

Structures and representation that offer specific, important lessons learned, particularly in CoC governance and service delivery. So any connections you can make with structures that exist out there, Youth Action Board again is a great example. If there's one in your community or nearby, you can learn a lot from that structure about how to incorporate people with lived experience.

A final thing we'll talk about on this slide is letters of support. It is -- sometimes letters of support are required for specific applications and things like that. You know letters of support from people with lived experience or groups of people with lived experience, however that exists in your structure, those letters can be a valuable way to demonstrate meaningful engagement, but

people with lived experience should never be compelled to provide written support on an activity.

So it should never be, here's an activity we are going to do. Please provide us written support. It should be, here is the thing that we have all developed together that you were involved in developing. How do you feel about it? Do you like it? Are you willing to support it in writing?

Okay. Expanding the leadership table to meaningfully include people with lived experience can be challenging but there are steps you can take to anticipate and address those challenges. So, develop the necessary structures and supports. So that means devoting the necessary resources. That includes money, staff time, et cetera, to be successful and ensure adequate support.

Create a variety of roles and opportunities to engage people with lived experience in small ways and allow them to participate in a way that works best for them. So we talked before about participation barriers. There can be a number of small ways that people with lived experience can participate and then create pathways to leadership that they can progress through after taking on those smaller roles in the beginning.

And it should be tailored again to individuals. Create genuine participation and leadership. Allow people to be authentically themselves. Listen to what they say and not how they say it. So remember what we said before about professional norms. Not everyone with lived experience is going to present what we might consider professional norms. That doesn't matter. Listen to what they say, not how they say it.

Create structural or create a structure and climate to provide for open feedback and meaningful participation. Do not tokenize. We discussed that earlier. I'm just repeating it for emphasis. Do not tokenize, and do not try to interpret. It's very common for those of us who have been in this line of work for some amount of time to have a lens through which we view system development, and the activities we undertake and will sometimes try to interpret feedback we're being given or advice and fit it into the lens through which we view those things.

Don't try to interpret what you are being told. Just listen because your stakeholders, in this case people with lived experience, they're telling you exactly what they want you to hear. So don't try to interpret. And then finally, ensure spaces where people are respected, valued and cared for. So that means prioritize the emotional climate over the need to complete an agenda. Allocate enough time for meetings and foster healthy relationships and group dynamics.

Another common challenge is finding money to compensate people with lived experience. I know that's question that I have heard fairly often. You know, we know that we need to compensate people for participation. But how do we pay for it? It's essential to compensate and to do so fairly. So, here are some things to consider.

First of all, ask how they want to be compensated, and be open to a variety of methods. So that could be cash, gift cards, checks, payment apps, or other things. Pay or reimburse for costs associated with participation. So we touched on this before. But again for emphasis, if it requires

transportation, if it requires lodging, be prepared to compensate for those costs or reimburse for them, however you need to.

And then we've listed on this slide some possible funding sources for paying people with lived experience for their participation. I'm not going to read them all off. You'll have access to these slides on the HUD Exchange later, but some notable ones here and again this is going to be very specific to your area, your locality, what is available and what's not. But some examples are local and state government flexible funds.

So, if you have local or state government funds that are flexible, that could be a source. Continuum of care funds, specifically planning grant funds can be used in this way and emergency solutions grants funds, if they are earmarked properly, can be used in this way. But this is something where you'll want to work in close partnership with your ESG recipient because those funds have to be earmarked properly.

Corporate grants, the faith community, foundations are all sources of flexible funds. And I keep saying that word flexible because that's a really important thing when you're looking for this funding. Having flexible funding for this is really useful and money from corporate grants, the faith community, and foundations does tend to be more flexible. And then good old-fashioned fundraising. If you have a mechanism for doing fundraising, and you can bring flexible money in that way, that is another good thing to consider for this purpose.

Another important way to include people with lived experience is to hire them and pay them a salary for their expertise. So you know, we've been talking up to this point a lot about the type of inclusivity and it looks like board participation, committee participation and that is very important, but it's also important to consider hiring them because then, you can like I just said, pay them a salary for their ongoing expertise.

Identify opportunities throughout the homeless services system and through multiple pathways. So that can include things like employment agencies. There's a variety of ways you could identify and then figure out roles for people with lived experience. Provide peer support as an option, particularly for those who may have higher barriers to stable employment. Provide fair and equitable compensation and benefits.

It should be in line with what anyone else with that role in your organization or in your system would receive. Build and promote racial equity in the hiring process and workplace culture and address any biases that may cause harm that you identify. Provide education and training in developing a workplace that is equitable, diverse, people centered and inclusive. The bottom line is invest in people with lived experience and invest in your workplace as somewhere that they are welcome and that they want to be.

People with lived experience in the workplace can benefit programs in a lot of really important ways. They can build relationships with clients that elicit trust, acceptance, understanding and empathy due to their shared experience. They can rediscover, develop and enhance professional and creative skills and abilities learned before, during or after their lives were interrupted by homelessness.

That's another important thing to remember. People experiencing homelessness very often had jobs, have skills they were exercising before this happened in their lives. And so this employment pathway can be a really important way to help them get back to those skills and use them. It can help them experience the sense of security, belonging and support of a work family, encourage and inspire others while assisting them to navigate barriers they may have faced themselves.

So that goes back to having that relationship with the people you're serving on a shared experience. They can support staff and clients by identifying strategies that can lead to changes and policies and practices that could help eliminate systemic and structural barriers that families and individuals experiencing homelessness may encounter.

And this is an important one as well, involving people with lived experience as employees can provide an example of leadership for people currently experiencing homelessness by demonstrating the capacity to exit homelessness and utilize the experience for future contributions.

There are some challenges that people bring up associated with hiring, retaining and supporting people with lived experience in the workplace. So, just a couple to discuss here. They may become discouraged and disempowered. So, organizations must design and sustain culturally responsive support systems to identify when that is happening and then do something to fix it. Trauma connected to poverty and homelessness can be triggered in the workplace in a number of ways.

So it's important to acknowledge the reality of trauma and plan to support people with lived experience and that includes creating space for them to acknowledge trauma, receive validation and employ healthy coping skills. And when there are triggers to trauma, they must be able to disconnect from that without repercussion. And then all staff in the organization should receive ongoing professional development training on homelessness, trauma and inclusion to make sure that you have that workplace atmosphere that remains inclusive.

And I am going to now turn it back over to Gordon to talk about advancing equity.

Gordon Levine: All right. Thank you, Mike. We're going to talk about advancing equity and during the section, we're going to talk sort of about general structure. And then we're going to get into some specific subpopulations that we're highlighting today. And I want to make two points about that.

First, sort of in reverse order, the specific subpopulations that we're highlighting aren't the only populations that have been marginalized out of homelessness services systems. They are populations that we are prominently aware of, that we are frequently responding to that we feel and the data shows guidance about would be valuable, but we don't want the fact that we are featuring certain subpopulations to be understood as these are the subpopulations.

As I said earlier, as Mike has continued to reiterate, and as we're going to keep saying throughout this webinar and the following webinars, ultimately these decisions are about making an assessment of your own local homelessness services system in your own homeless populations in determining who is marginalized in your communities. That's the first point.

But the second one that I want to point out is that equity conversations can be uncomfortable. And in the sense that this is a conversation and that it's really more of a presentation, I want to own that presenting as well as having conversations about equity can also be uncomfortable. I am a member of several of the subpopulations that we're going to be talking about today. I'm not a member of all of them.

And so part of my process in preparing for this webinar was necessarily educating myself to the point where I was able to speak with knowledge on some of the subjects that I simply don't have sort of a natural aptitude on. And so I share that with all of you to say that as you're taking back any of this to your communities to improve and advance equity in your own homeless services systems, be aware that all of these conversations have the potential to be uncomfortable and that's okay.

Discomfort is a normal effect of making changes that can be really impactful but they challenge you to go beyond your pre-existing set of knowledge and experiences. So that being said, we're going to go ahead and launch right into that.

So, an overview of the advancing equity. Advancing equity means confronting and correcting a common reality in homeless services systems. That while services may be equally available, they are often not equitably available and that's really the distinction that we're drawing out here. The difference between what equality is and what equity is.

There's a visual on the screen. I would encourage you to take a moment to review it because I think it's really powerful and illustrates that difference effectively. Advancing equity requires systems to implement inclusive stakeholder engagement, practices, and consult with people with lived experience to identify the people who are being underserved and what their barriers to inclusion are and develop a plan for change.

And I want to give an example of sort of the difference between equity and equality. My background is in working with statewide ESG recipients and balance of state [inaudible], which means that I've spent a lot of time working with and on disparities between urban and rural areas. Once CoC that I work with was divided into multiple catchment areas and each area had an urban or at least an urban-ish center surrounded by rural territory for, in some cases, hundreds of miles in every direction.

And so each of those areas had projects, CoC projects, ESG projects, other projects that in theory served the entire area. But in practice, those projects were headquartered in the urban centers. And I should say that everyone involved, me and the projects and the staff, everyone involved [inaudible] there was a challenge in creating access for people who lived outside those urban centers. And that the projects in question, all of them worked hard to create an access.

Even so, the reality was that while all those projects' resources were equally available to all participants, right, anyone in those areas could apply for assistance and could receive assistance, there was no restriction on that. Those services were not equitably available to all participants because they were simply more accessible to participants who were living in the urban centers. That disparity is a lack of equity and when the COCs worked and when the CoC in question worked to improve that access outside those urban centers, they were advancing equity and had a meaningful and visible impact on both the projects in question and the participants who were being served.

One of the things we want to highlight is that the structure for advancing equity is the same for all populations and I want you to hold on to that topic because we're going to come back to it in a couple of slides. The structure for advancing equity is the same for all populations. And some of the underpinning pieces of that process are consulting with members of the marginalized population, recognizing that marginalized people are experts on their own experiences, needs, preferences and desires.

And conversely, that assumptions made about people who are experts on their own experiences will necessarily be wrong to some extent, that you need to develop changes in partnership with the people that they will affect. Again, this is about prioritizing the perspectives and needs of the people who you are trying to bring into the fold. It's about implementing changes gradually and with intentionality, believing that things will not happen in a day and acting on that belief.

Assessing your outcomes, so putting a plan in place to understand your outcomes, positive and negative, celebrating your successes and identifying what is not yet working while recognizing that what isn't yet working will at some point, if you push on it, be something that is working and a success that you celebrate. And then finally, continuing to consult and iterate as old barriers persist and new barriers emerge. And of course, the people we're talking about consulting with are the people who are being impacted, right, your marginalized populations, and their members.

And, you know, these are really just the structural elements. And in the next slides, we're going to talk about how to apply them. So that thought that I asked you to hold onto is really finished here. While the structure of advancing equity is the same for all populations, the process of advancing equity is different for every population because every population is different and we can talk about structural pieces all day.

But at the end of the day, the implementation is different. But these are the populations that we're going to be talking about today. We're talking about black, indigenous people of color, BIPOC, and while the slide doesn't call these populations out specifically, we name them in subsequent slides that we're also talking about people who are Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Latina.

We're talking about people who are LGBTQ+ and I do want to call out that this is a population that I belong to. I prefer this acronym, LGBTQ+. There are other acronyms that are equally valid. The important part is to recognize that we're talking about a broad umbrella of people with many different experiences and perspectives. We're talking about people with disabilities; we're talking about people fleeing domestic violence and we're talking about youth age 24 and under.

The following slides may help communities, really we hope that they help communities, begin to advance equity for certain marginalized and underserved populations. But and I really want you to hear me when I say this, they're not intended to be comprehensive. These are starting points. They're sparks that we hope you take back to your own community and use as a place to begin from, to begin building a more equitable system for serving people experiencing homelessness.

They're not intended to be comprehensive or all-inclusive. They are beginnings so please take them as such. So, talking about black, indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Latina communities. And again you're going to see the BIPOC acronym but often we're going to be spelling it out because we really are talking about populations that go beyond black, indigenous and people of color as a sort of catch-all.

We're going to spotlight some data here. Homelessness by race and ethnicity. People who are black, indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Latina make up a disproportionate share of those who experience homelessness. Compared to the full U.S. Census, a person experiencing homelessness is 44 percent more likely to be a member of any of the populations that we just discussed, 25 percent more likely to be Hispanic or Latino, nearly 400 percent more likely to be black and more than 500 percent more likely to be indigenous, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

All of this data, I should say is cited at the bottom. We have many slides that are calling out data. There are citations. You can go review them and pull them directly from the original sources and we encourage you to engage with that data, both on the national level and locally to determine really how this applies to your communities.

Essential considerations for engaging black, indigenous, and people of color populations. Systems and services really need to reflect the people that they serve and we'll talk a little bit more about that later. Homeless services spaces also must be made actively welcoming to black, indigenous, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander and Latina people.

So black, indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Latina includes a range of identities and cultures. So not just any of these individual identities that we're calling up. But all of these are complex and diverse and there are local cultures and subcultures that absolutely require your assessment. Systems and service providers have to understand who they're serving, a question that can only be answered with ongoing proactive and local assessment.

We're going to keep hammering on this. At the end of the day, we can talk about national trends and general tendencies and general ideas about how to address any of these equity advancements. But fundamentally, you need to do the work locally to understand who has been excluded from your system and how to include them. Homeless services spaces are frequently not created with people who are black, indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander or Latina in mind.

Genuinely accessible spaces are designed to meet their users' specific needs. This is not specific to the population we're talking about. This is true for everyone. And ideally, those accessible spaces are made that way by incorporating their users into space design, implementation and assessment. There is no one-size-fits-all guide to creating systems, services and spaces that work for black, indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Latina people.

But the people being served should be involved at every level of system development from planning to design to service delivery. That is how you ensure that despite the absence of a one-size-fits-all guide, that's how you develop a local one size fits your community guide, right? That's how you develop your own roadmap to success in advancing equity.

On the subject of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and queer populations or LGBTQ+, again there are other acronyms. This is the one that I prefer; others are equally valid. Some data on LGBTQ+ homelessness. The most powerful data about LGBTQ+ homelessness exists in the youth space. That's a consequence of several different contributing factors, including the power of the youth homeless demonstration program awards. That data can be extrapolated to fill in the gaps about homelessness among LGBTQ+ adults.

LGBTQ+ youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness as other youth. Up to 40 percent of youth experiencing homelessness are LGBTQ+ compared to 5.6 percent of the U.S. population, 65 percent of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness also experienced discrimination within their family and physical violence compared to other youth, 35 percent of whom experienced family discrimination and 45 percent of whom experienced physical violence.

Finally, 63 percent of transgender adults experiencing homelessness live in places not meant for human habitation, compared to 49 percent of cisgender people. Moreover, 60 percent of transgender people experiencing unsheltered homelessness live with co-occurring physical, mental, and substance use disorders.

On the subject of transgender and gender non-conforming homelessness. National pit count data shows the transgender and gender non-conforming homelessness increased more than 350 percent between 2015 and 2020, compared to a more gradual increase in cisgender homelessness. This disparity likely reflects the challenges and discriminations that people who are transgender and gender conforming face in the U.S. today, both inside and outside the homeless services systems.

Essential considerations for serving people who are LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ is a fluid set of identities. Again, we're talking about complexity that cannot be captured in an acronym or a set of identities [inaudible]. In LGBTQ+ homelessness, abuse is a common thread.

And so we are necessarily talking about a population that experiences high rates of domestic violence and serving people who are transgender and gender conforming requires identity recognition and respect because so much of the marginalization of people who are transgender and gender non-conforming comes in the form of identity, not just failure to recognize, but identity denial and a lack of respect for the way that people identify. LGBTQ+ covers a range of sexual orientations and gender identities, which are fluid and frequently overlap.

LGBTQ+ cultural competency requires recognizing every person as the expert on their gender identity and sexual orientation. And understanding that every person is empowered to choose when, how and to whom that they identify. On the subject of fluidity also, note that these identities are not stable even within an individual person.

And so a person may identify, as for example, bisexual at one point in their life. They may identify differently at a different point in their life. A person may identify as cisgender at one point and come later to identify as transgender. And when we talk about [inaudible], right, the sort of large umbrella word that encapsulates many different identities, people may identify using that word or a different word, or a different term, and they move in and out of that identification at different times in their lives.

People who are LGBTQ+ experiencing homelessness frequently cite physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as their reason for leaving home. It is especially important to incorporate trauma-informed practices into homeless services for people who are transgender and gender non-conforming.

Finally, advancing equity for people who are LGBTQ+ necessarily requires spaces and services that proactively recognize and respect gender identity and sexual orientation. And what we really need is respect a diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations.

Michael Thomas: People with disabilities. Some data on people with disabilities experiencing homelessness. People with disabilities make up a significant portion of the U.S. homeless population and face significantly higher barriers to achieving and maintaining and retaining housing. Twenty-four percent of people experiencing homelessness are living with a disability, compared to 12.7 percent of the total population.

Up to 15 percent of people experiencing homelessness will experience chronic homelessness, the definition of which includes living with a disability. More than two-thirds of people with disabilities, who do experience chronic homelessness, live in unsheltered locations compared to 37 percent of the total population and people who are living in permanent supportive housing or PSH are older. In 2016, a study demonstrated that more than half, 54 percent, were over age 50, including nearly 31,000 people who are aged 62 and over.

And a spotlight on disability by type and PSH. So, in PSH, permanent supportive housing, nearly three-quarters of people are living nearly, I'm sorry. Nearly three-quarters of people living in PSH are living with a mental health disorder or co-occurring substance use disorder, while 27 percent are living with a physical disability and six percent are living with a developmental disability, which not to in any way discount the importance or impact of living with a physical disability or a developmental disability. But at least to me, this slide significantly highlights the near ubiquity of mental health challenges in our homeless services systems.

Some essential considerations when working with people with disabilities. Accommodations are disability-specific. There is no general accommodation. There are only accommodations that are specific to populations and to needs and to individual people. A significant barrier can be

housing accessibility. Everybody knows this. It shouldn't be news but it is worth -- it bears repeating. Finally, SSDI can be a critical and stabilizing source of income for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness.

As I said, disability accommodations are specific to the person. Providers should consult with participants to determine what accommodations the participant requires to fully engage services and achieve self-sufficient permanent housing. In most housing markets, affordable housing with disability accommodations is especially limited. Systems and providers should work with landlords to identify units with accommodations and match them to participants who have those specific needs that are met by those accommodations.

Finally systems should ensure that all people with disabilities, without job income, are connected to SSDI, SORE, which is a model for connecting people with SSI and SSDI effectively, which is maintained, reported on and promulgated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA, is a particularly powerful tool for SSDI access.

SORE assisted initial applications are decided more quickly and are more than twice as likely to be approved. There's a lot of data out there about SORE. If you're operating a permanent supportive housing program or working people with disabilities, I strongly encourage you to look into SORE, as it really is a powerful tool for serving this population.

People fleeing domestic violence. For people fleeing domestic violence, it is a significant cause of homelessness in the United States. More than a third of all domestic violence victims will experience homelessness. A significant portion of the U.S. homeless population lost housing as a result of domestic violence and shelter and housing remain the primary unmet needs for people fleeing domestic violence.

Per a 2019 report from the National Network to End Domestic Violence, 44 percent of cities surveyed identified domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness in their area. Thirty-eight percent of all domestic violence victims experience homelessness at some point in their lives. More than 90 percent of women experiencing homelessness have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. And on a single day used as a point in time, 63 percent of the unmet requests from households fleeing domestic violence and emergency shelter or for housing.

Essential considerations when serving people fleeing domestic violence. Domestic violence is experienced by people of all genders. I'm going to linger and reiterate this point. On the previous slide, we highlighted the overwhelming majority of women fleeing domestic violence who suffered severe physical and sexual abuse, but that's not intended to communicate that domestic violence is an issue that is specific and exclusively about women.

Domestic violence is experienced by people of all genders and we say all genders because we're talking not just about men and women but people who are transgender, gender non-conforming or other gender and of those last three populations, they are also disproportionately likely to experience domestic violence.

Domestic violence can occur before and / or during people's experience homelessness and victim service providers are critical stakeholders, not just in serving people who identify as fleeing domestic violence or experiencing domestic violence, but in serving people experiencing homelessness in general. While women and people who are transgender experience disproportionately high levels of domestic violence, as I said, people of all genders experiencing homelessness are at heightened risk of experiencing or having experienced domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a significant cause of homelessness and an unfortunately prevalent trauma inflicted on people experiencing homelessness. Service providers, it says should, but really must incorporate domestic violence assessments as an ongoing part of relationship building and case management. And when we say service providers, we mean all service providers, not just those who are victim service providers by identification.

Finally victim service providers, as I said, are critical stakeholders in homeless services. And I want to highlight that they are especially important in rural areas where they're disproportionately likely to be the most effective or the only service providers available.

On the subject of Youth. The data on youth homelessness. While the number of youth experiencing homelessness is gradually decreasing, again due to programs such as the Youth Homeless Demonstration program, nearly 1 in 12 people experiencing homelessness is aged 24 and under and youth experiencing homelessness are still at elevated risk of physical violence and domestic violence.

Six percent of people experiencing homelessness during the 2019 point-in-time count for unaccompanied youth, and another 1.5 percent were youth parenting at least one child under the age of 18. The total number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, declined eight and a half percent between 2017 and 2019, with the largest decline of more than 12 percent seen in youth living in unsheltered locations.

Unaccompanied youth are more than three times as likely to be transgender or gender non-conforming than members of the individual homeless population, three percent compared to less than one percent, and that's other members of the individual homeless population. Finally 62 percent of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing physical harm or being physically harmed compared to 47 percent of straight and cisgender youth.

And on the subject of this data, what I would highlight is that some of this really reveals the vulnerability of youth experiencing homelessness, but it also reveals the progress that has been made in addressing youth homelessness across the United States. And as we said earlier, it's important to celebrate your successes.

Essential considerations for serving youth. Youth experience magnified in equity from other identities. We're going to talk about that more in just a moment. Several systems of care affect youth homelessness, and youth homelessness is differently visible than adult homelessness. Inequities in the total homeless population are magnified in the youth homeless population.

What we mean by that is that youth experiencing homelessness are even more disproportionately likely to be black, indigenous or a person of color, to be LGBTQ+, to report mental health problems, challenges and to experience domestic violence. So what we're saying is that youth experiencing homelessness face compounded challenges from additional marginalized identities that are theirs.

Gordon Levine. Youth homelessness is impacted by several youth specific systems of care, including foster care, juvenile justice and schools. These systems can have a powerful positive effect on youth homelessness and a state or local community if they are properly engaged. And youth often do not request services through traditional outlets like drop-in centers and adult-focused street outreach.

Most homeless services systems must develop youth specific outreach and single-site options to effectively serve youth. And really the reason we say most is because the ones that don't, already have those options in place. That brings us to the end of that section. I'm turning it back over to Mike to talk about engagement with tribal nations.

Michael Thomas: Thank you Gordon. So I am going to talk now about engaging with tribal nations. I do want to call out up front that I do not have lived experience as a member of tribal nations. So, I do not intend to speak from any place of lived experience here. So I just want to call that out up front. We have drawn from a number of research sources and things of that nature. So just want to point that out up front but it is important. So let's jump right. It's important to note here that for most CoCs that have neighboring tribal nations, meaningful engagement with those tribal nations is either a new thing or it's something that they have done, but is an important area of growth.

When we look at homelessness among American Indian and Alaska native households, we see that they are disproportionately affected by homelessness at around 10 times the rate of the total population. Those households experience homelessness at a rate of about 10 percent, while this percentage for the general population is only just a little over one percent. Homelessness in tribal areas is often less noticeable and primarily takes the form of living doubled up or in overcrowded housing. And then note that the data on the total number of people who identify as Native American is limited due in part to low point in time count coverage and undercounting in the United States census.

HUD encourages CoCs to reach out to neighboring tribes, and they encourage tribally designated housing entities to reach out to CoCs in order to identify partnership opportunities. And this is really important because in 2021, there were 691 tribal organizations and the land that they covered might look like it was overlapping with 132 different CoCs.

So there is a lot of opportunity for overlaps there and a lot of opportunity for partnership. Subject to any HUD requirements, CoCs with explicit tribal approval, I want to repeat that, with explicit tribal approval, are expected to serve tribal lands as part of the CoC geography, including creating ways for tribal entities to achieve equitable access to CoC funds. I also want to throw in a note here that since 2021, HUD has been implementing and expanding on the ways that tribal nations may participate in the CoC program.

There's some important steps that CoCs can take to engage with neighboring tribal nations. One of those is engage with tribal entities while recognizing tribal sovereignty. That one, I don't want to say that as if it's an option. If you were going to engage with tribal entities, you must respect tribal sovereignty as part of that process. Rely on and grow relationships between tribal entities, and existing CoC stakeholders. And this includes recognizing that tribal members may experience homelessness outside of the tribal nations' boundaries.

So if your CoC's neighbor is a tribal nation, it's quite possible that you might have a population of people from the tribal nation in the CoCs geography experiencing homelessness. So that makes these partnerships really important. Create a [inaudible] process and we're talking here about your local competition process, that facilitate equitable access by tribal entities. Offer tribal-focused training on essential CoC functions. And that includes things like coordinated entry and use of the homeless management information system.

Create opportunities for meaningful representation of tribal entities. We talked a lot in my previous section about meaningful engagement and meaningful representation of people with lived experience and some of those principles around meaningful representation can be pulled towards when you think about giving meaningful roles and things like CoC governance to tribal entities.

And then recognize tribal entities as experts on their own experiences. Accept the feedback that you receive and make adjustments based on that feedback. And now I'm going to jump into rural communities and we will talk about some specifics around rural communities.

In the 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, largely rural CoCs had the highest percentage of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness at 41 percent. This percentage remains high though we want to note that in more recent data and more recent AHARs, COVID has had a high impact on data collection. So we use something a little farther back here as a little more concrete.

Gordon Levine: Challenges for Rural Continuum of Care include they often have a large geography with low population density and few service providers in that geography. The prevalence of poverty and the absence of mainstream resources is also a challenge in large and rural CoCs. Challenges with data collection and that's true for homeless services systems and in general in rural CoCs very often. Scarce affordable housing stock, and then distance from jobs and support is an issue.

Economic opportunities are even more limited and can be constrained by lack of transportation in rural CoCs and then lack of available fast, affordable internet access will compound other challenges in the increasingly interconnected world that we live in. So, the running themes here are that large geography, lack of resource distribution and lack of transportation and technology to facilitate access to services and resources are issues very often in large and or rural continuum of care.

It's also not uncommon to see rural areas have a different balance of service provider types. So in urban areas, we often see more general services providers and relatively speaking fewer victim services providers. In rural areas, that balance is often reversed where you will see a higher proportion relatively of victim service providers and fewer general service providers. So it's an important thing to keep in mind when you're thinking about the resources that are available currently in rural areas.

Another important thing to mention here we just talked about tribal nations. There's a very important intersection between rural areas and tribal nations. And this can amplify the challenges that they each experience. Outdated definitions and poor data quality in the sense lead to a misunderstanding about the significance of the Native American population. Due to challenges with data collection, data-driven decision making often leads to rural native communities being left behind for public and private assistance.

In 2012, 54 percent of American Indian and Alaskan native households lived in rural and small-town areas. But it's important to note there that there are large fluctuations in that percentage at the state level. So it looks very, very different from state to state, which is why it's important to know your locality. Members of tribal nations and indigenous populations experiencing homelessness in rural areas will experience similar issues to other populations but those issues are likely to be more acute for them. It's critical for spot systems in rural areas to intentionally and meaningfully include tribal nations, and indigenous populations in their systems.

Diversity is also an important consideration in rural areas. The U.S. rural population is becoming increasingly diverse and homeless services systems must consider this. Indigenous, African American and Hispanic Latino populations show greater rates of increase in rural areas than other population types.

But it's also important to note here, that the distribution of people who are black, indigenous, and people of color in rural areas is highly regionalized. So systems must assess the local population and the cultures that exist in their local population. To address homelessness, rural communities must understand local demographics, and then formulate strategies using inclusive stakeholder engagement with an intentional focus on advancing equity.

Michael Thomas: So some final thoughts and considerations for rural communities. Engage a geographically diverse set of partners and systems. So that can mean engaging people with influence and from a variety of sectors. Partners along those lines might include community action agencies, family resource networks, county government or county leadership, business and civic leaders, local law enforcement, affordable housing operators, public housing authorities, hospitals, school district officials and school homeless liaisons. They can all be important partners.

Engage mainstream systems, faith-based partners and informal partners. So you're thinking here about leveraging non-targeted systems like [inaudible], SSDI, SSVI, Medicaid, we mentioned public housing authorities here again because they're important, behavioral health and Workforce Development.

Gordon Levine: And then when you think about behavioral health, partner with behavioral health to address opioid use and other substances as they may be locally significant and foster relationships with faith-based partners. That's a really important one here too because in many rural areas, faith-based partners will be the primary support system that exists there.

Michael Thomas: Build trust with non-traditional partners and we're talking here about engaging with partners like potentially park rangers, if you have national parks, local businesses and others who routinely interact with the community, and those who may be unstably housed or experiencing homelessness. So, an example here is, if you're in a rural area and you have one convenience store in town and that's where people experiencing homelessness go to, you know, buy food or by water or what have you, building a trusting relationship with the operators of that business may then, you know, help create an inroad for you to start engaging with the homeless population in that area to hopefully get them to some services. So building that trust is very important.

With that, I'm going to wrap us up on this section and we will move into the Q&A portion. I'm taking a look at the questions that we might not have gotten to. Do you have any top of mine Gordon?

Gordon Levine: Oh, lots. We had a lot of great questions come through and we deferred several of them. So thank you for your patience. If your question was deferred, it was because we thought it was something that everyone could benefit from. And so I will kind of just go through and see what we've got. So, I'm going to kick this one over to you Mike. We had a question, how do you suggest recruiting individuals with lived experience to participate?

Michael Thomas: That is a good question. And the answer to that question is probably going to vary a lot, depending on what types of providers you have and what your local system looks like. I think my first piece of advice based on my community experience, is start with your providers and they can usually help you figure out the best way to identify people and build relationships with them. So, that would be my first step I think in providing -- in trying to build those relationships. Yeah, I think starting with the providers is the first place I'd go with that. What would you add to that, Gordon?

Gordon Levine: No, I think that was exactly right. This is one of those issues where you've got a structure in place, right, starting with your providers and asking do you have participants who would be interested in participating? And this is how you express what participation would mean and this is how participants will be compensated for being involved, which should be paying them for being involved. And at that point then, your service provider should really be able to be your funnel for participants. Yeah, that's the way I would go about it. It's certainly the way that I've gone about it in the past like that.

Looking down here, this is another good one. I'm going to kick this one to you again Mike because it is also in your area. We had a question does everyone with lived experience have to share their story?

Michael Thomas: Exactly the one I was looking at Gordon when I just said, this is a good one. No, they do not. I'm going to say that pretty forcefully because you do not want to re-traumatize people who have experienced homelessness. And so they do not have to share their story. If you identify, for instance, someone with lived experience who wants to participate through a service provider, you know they have that lived experience. You know, they have the capacity to provide good guidance to you, there is no need to re-traumatize them by making them tell their story again even once, much less multiple times. So my answer to that one is no.

Gordon Levine: I'm with it. I'm going to kick you one more. And I think you answered this in the Q&A, but I liked your answer and I want to make sure everybody hears it. The question, we had a couple of them come through, that boils down to are funding streams recognizing the need to equip and compensate people with lived experience in grant funding limitations, which is really a question about what are our options for paying people with lived experience for their time?

Michael Thomas: Yeah, I'm going to kind of repeat what I put in the Q&A there for that one, which is that I think there is recognition, especially when we think about the fact that HUD has been, you know, messaging that, you know, you can use your planning grant for this purpose. However, federal funding sources tend to be limited by statutes and regulations. So regardless of the desire to be flexible, it's often difficult to be flexible. And then state and local government funding sources can have similar limitations. So, that is why I think flexible funds, if you can secure them, this is a really good use for them.

Gordon Levine: Sounds good to me. And that's exactly how I would answer it. You start with your CoC planning grant. But other than that, flex funds are where you're going to live. So I'm going to go ahead and take the next one which just jumped off of my queue so you're going to have to give me a second to find it. There's a question, are there any tips to following the meaningful engagement guidelines when under rigid timelines to meet obligations for funding applications and so on. So this is timely. We are, of course, aware that there are significant funding applications in process.

And the answer that I'm going to give is unfortunately not one you're going to like very much. The reality is if you are staring down a funding application, let's say a very big funding application, and that application says to you, hey, you've got to do XYZ things to create engagement, to meet a minimum engagement requirement on people with lived experience, for example.

If you're to the point where that funding opportunity is now available and the clock is ticking toward a deadline and you are not in a position where you've begun that work, you're probably not going to be in a position to generate really good, meaningful engagement before your funding application is due.

So I mentioned earlier that my background is in working with state ESG recipients and with balance of state CoCs. There were many times when I was confronted with an application question for any number of different applications where I simply did not have a good answer yet, right? It was a community goal that we had not yet taken action on and most of the time, the

decision that our CoC came to was that instead of chasing points and obviously, we want points, right?

We want to do well in our funding applications but rather than chasing points and sacrificing the elements of meaningful engagement, which is necessarily about recognizing that it's a process that can take time and investment, and just doesn't happen well on a timeline, saying we're not going to chase those points this year. But we realize that this question will probably come around again next year, and next year, we're going to have a good answer to it. Mike, anything you'd add to that?

Michael Thomas: No, I think that's a really good answer. I was thinking along the same lines. The timelines for funding applications are always going to be what they are. And you know, you can usually tell what the priorities of a given funding stream or over time and so when they, when you see these things start popping up in those funding applications, it is a good idea to think of it as a longer-term system building activity that will get you increasing points as you move forward. That would be my [inaudible].

Gordon Levine: That's great. I'm going to resurface again for myself another question that I did answer in the Q&A. We had a question during the section that focused on several marginalized populations. What about veterans in the re-entry population? I think this is a great question.

I want to reiterate what I said at the beginning of that section, which is that that section was not, is not intended to be comprehensive or all inclusive of all practices or all populations that might be marginalized in your community, right?

And the response is, you know, if you feel or if you have data that says those populations are marginalized in your community and I would be surprised if you couldn't find the data, you know, follow that data, conduct an assessment, identify your local populations that are marginalized, which might go well beyond, right, the populations we discussed today, Veterans and people who are in the re-entry population.

Determine who is present and who has been excluded and then go from there. For veterans in the re-entry specifically, there is an increasing wealth of information and research out there about how to better serve and better design projects that serve members of those populations. We encourage you to look into those and apply them locally. I think you'll see a lot of success with that. Anything you'd add there, Mike?

Michael Thomas: Nope. That was a good answer.

Gordon Levine: Looking through the queue, Mike, do you have anything you want to kick to one of us?

Michael Thomas: There's one here which was specifically directed to me but I think because it was in my section, but I'd love to hear if you have something to add too, Gordon. So, can we talk about the give-and-take relationship when you're thinking about engaging people with lived experience and what that give-and-take relationship entails and should look like.

Gordon Levine: Sure. God, that's a long conversation. We could do a whole webinar on that. I think that I would say in terms of it's very general, right? It's always going to be specific to the individual person. In general, what you're talking about is a relationship in which people with lived experience are able to contribute meaningfully to the system.

So the system benefits are obvious and they range from better information from people who are being served, which leads to better practices, so there's the holistic benefit, to there are going to be funding applications that require or request that you have a certain level of engagement with people with lived experience and they'll reward you for doing that. So the benefits to the system are pretty clear.

The benefits to the participants, right, people with lived experience, who are now stakeholders, are not necessarily as clear. And so there should be tangible incentives, right? So, that's when we're talking about compensation and not just compensation for time worked, but also recognizing as Mike said, you know, we're going to compensate people for childcare and for travel and education and so on, to ensure that they're able to participate fully.

But the reality is that our assumption that there's this dichotomy between service providers who want to help people experiencing homelessness, and people experiencing homelessness, whose only interest in this situation is leaving homelessness and never talking about it ever again and never being involved in the direction of the services that they take, never being involved in the community that is responding to homelessness.

That dichotomy is false, it's wrong, it's not real. And so the benefit ultimately to people who are experiencing homelessness and who are participating in their homeless services system ranges from -- it ranges from any number of different versions of this. Ultimately, it's recognizing that people often do not simply want to be acted upon by a system, but want to be actors in that system, contributors to it, either while they are experiencing homelessness in our case, or after they have experienced homelessness and returned to housing, either because they want to feel active and seen, recognized, acknowledged and empowered, or because they feel a responsibility to a system that benefited them, that they would like to pass along and improve for people who come after them. Anything you want to add there, Mike?

Michael Thomas: I think that's a really good answer. I was thinking about my answer too and I was thinking about how, you know, in that give-and-take scenario, you've got the agency that wants to compensate, but we have limited funds, and you've got the person who wants to participate, but I have limited capacity to do so. So it's more about switching the paradigm from the I don't have this, I can't do this, to the paradigm of here's what we do have, here is what I can do and then how do we meet in the middle in a way that's beneficial for everyone involved?

Gordon Levine: I think that's great. Other questions you want to kick up?

Michael Thomas: There are a number of questions that have popped up here about when you compensate people with lived experience and the effects that that can have on benefits that they

might be receiving. I will take an initial stab at just saying any decision like that is going to be really individualized to a specific situation.

You don't want to cause harm. Ultimately, the decision there has to be an agreement between you and the person with lived experience to whom this might have an effect. So I don't think there is an across-the-board answer there. I think you just have to take that situation for what it is right there in front of you and agree with what the best thing to do is.

Gordon Levine: Yeah, I agree. If I had got that question, I would have said it's a question to talk to your staff accountant and maybe your staff attorney and maybe the HUD AAQ about. That's a good place to ask the question. I want to [inaudible] this one and see what you think about this. Got a question, how do you suggest best relaying this information to CoC members at large? What do you think, Mike?

Michael Thomas: Oh, I think that one depends on what you do locally too, you know? I mean the materials will be available so you could just relay the raw material by emailing them out, but if you're going to, as I would suggest, take what we are teaching here and then create a local context around it, CoC membership meetings can be a great place to do that. Your governance meetings might be a good place to do that, but if you're talking about CoC membership as a whole, I'd say your membership meetings or even special training events. But I do think my best practice suggestion there will be to take what you have learned and apply that local context, because that's probably going to be more useful for your CoC members where you are. What do you think?

Gordon Levine: I think that's exactly right and I would just say we did this webinar and if you benefited from it, pass it along. The materials will be available. Yeah, just because you weren't here live doesn't mean you can't benefit and there are formal webinars in this series. And so if you feel that this is important to your community, encourage your community to attend.

We recognize that it is [inaudible] season, but that doesn't mean it's no learning season. I'm going to surface one more question because I recognize we're coming up on time. I want to take a stab at it and then I want to pass over to Mike to get his take. There's a question, we had several questions.

How do you about basically how do you tackle tokenism, right? How do you ensure that you're not tokenizing people? And what I would say to that ultimately is don't tokenize them, right? The tokenizing people is really about seeing them as a resource that you can take advantage of and asking them to represent their entire community.

The way you avoid that is by building a reciprocal relationship in which the person is benefiting as much as the system and by not stopping at, we're going to have one person with lived experience give one piece of feedback in this exact way, but rather soliciting and ongoing soliciting more stakeholders from your served communities to ensure that the people who want to contribute are able to so, have opportunities to do so, are aware that they can do so and are invited to do so. You avoid tokenism by avoiding tokenism. Mike, anything you want to add on that before we close it out?

Michael Thomas: Yeah, I think you're right. Just really quickly like it almost brings to mind for me the difference between calling out and calling in. Like you create something and then say hey you person with lived experience. We need your advice. Do you like this? You're kind of calling them out and just, you know, that is tokenism.

Whereas calling them in is more, you know, we are working on this thing. We need your feedback to develop this thing. Let's bring you into this process and get meaningful engagement from you.

Gordon Levine: All right. Well thank you all for attending. I'm going to pass it to Mike to close out, but I just want to say we have many kind comments in the Q&A. We're seeing them, we can't reply to them directly. There's lots of them but we appreciate you all. Mike, you want to close us out?

Michael Thomas: Yeah, I'm going to leave you here with some resources. You should be able to use these links when the materials are posted. But just want to point out, we have put in these last couple of slides all of the places we drew data and information from. And we have also put in here some things that would be valuable resources for you as you move forward. And with that, we will conclude the presentation. Thank you all for attending. We really appreciate your attention.

(END)