



**Building the Field of Community Engagement** is a collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. With funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Building the Field is bolstering the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraging other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. As part of the project, the partners produced a film, *Community at the Center*, which discusses the core principles and values of this important work, and they host the Engaged Learning Series, which are community conversations on critical community engagement topics. This report is the first in a series of tools and case studies that will document the partners' and other practitioners' knowledge and learning throughout the project.

**Building the Field partners:**

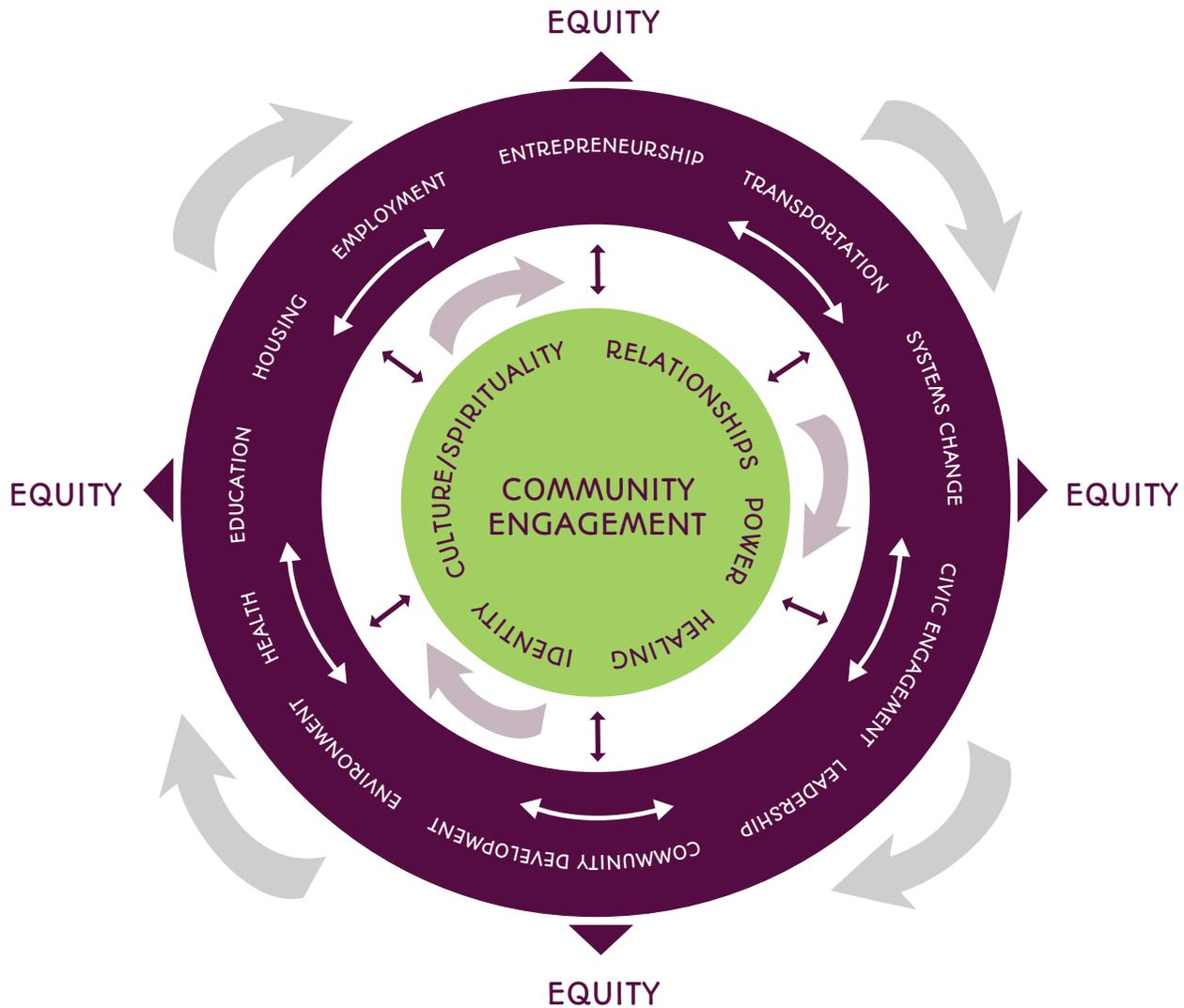
- Casa de Esperanza
- Cultural Wellness Center
- Hope Community
- Lyndale Neighborhood Association
- Native American Community Development Institute
- Nexus Community Partners

## THE IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a process that includes multiple techniques to promote the participation of residents in community life, especially those who are excluded and isolated. Community engagement involves them in collective action to create a healthy community, but for many people and communities, the impacts of community engagement go far beyond whatever the specific outcome of that action may be. Impacts may include community healing, reclaiming a healthy identity, reconnecting with culture and spirituality, building relationships, and embracing individual and collective power. In fact, good community engagement requires the strengthening and maintenance of those elements.

At the first Engaged Learning Series event of the Building the Field of Community Engagement initiative, *Community Engagement Matters: Stories of Success*, more than 50 community engagement practitioners joined together to discuss the challenge of defining and measuring these less visible outcomes. Despite being difficult to capture, community engagement practitioners know that these elements are imperative to achieving the more visible outcomes of improved health, sustainable housing, better educational attainment and more.

At the March 2014 event, the Building the Field partners presented a visual model of the outcomes of community engagement. The participants provided critical feedback, and helped shape the evolving model on page 2. This model, including the definitions of terms, will continue to evolve as we all learn from our work and as we learn from future Engaged Learning events.



*The Impacts of Community Engagement model describes the outcomes that result from authentic community engagement.*

**The outer circle** outcomes are the tangible, visible goals of the work that community members do together.

**The inner circle** outcomes are achieved in the process of doing the work and are foundational elements of a healthy community in their own right. These assets are the building blocks for positive change in all of the areas of the outer circle and need to be attended to or strengthened in a long-term process, during and beyond the process of achieving an outcome in the outer circle. The importance of these elements is often overlooked and communities' work in these areas is often under-resourced.

**The wheel as a whole** is fluid and dynamic, demonstrating the perpetual interconnectedness of the elements. The model demonstrates the power of community engagement to impact multiple levels and systems, and to create sustained change that lasts beyond a project or campaign.

After the first Engaged Learning event, the Building the Field partners noticed that even experienced community engagement practitioners offered a variety of definitions and understandings of some of the most frequently used terms in the field. The following are the working definitions the partners use to describe the elements of the model. Coming to a collective understanding about what these terms mean will help to build the field of community engagement.

## INNER CIRCLE:

*Outcomes that are also an essential part of the process.*

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A process that includes multiple techniques to promote the participation of residents in community life, especially those who are excluded and isolated, by engaging them in collective action to create a healthy community.

### RELATIONSHIPS

The practice of community engagement requires the building of authentic, long-term relationships involving trust, respect, and reciprocity.

### IDENTITY

Community engagement supports the maintenance, development, and/or reclaiming of a healthy sense of self for individuals and includes a sense of belonging to groups that give a person connection, continuity, and meaning.

### CULTURE/SPIRITUALITY

Community engagement nurtures the practices, beliefs, traditions, and ways of knowing that create cohesion and give people a vision across generations.

### HEALING

Community engagement provides the space to draw meaning from a personal or collective story, and recognize and build on strengths and resilience. It acknowledges and promotes wholeness.

### POWER

Community engagement activates and exercises the ability to act for personal and community benefit.

## OUTER CIRCLE:

*Tangible, visible outcomes of the work.*

### LEADERSHIP

Using strengths to act and inspire, influence, and/or support others in building and supporting healthy communities.

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Full participation in the political process that promotes a community's self-determination.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Activities that encourage using local resources in a way that enhances economic opportunities while improving social conditions in a sustainable way. The common distinction between community development and community engagement is that community development focuses more on place (bricks and mortar) whereas community engagement focuses more on people.

### SYSTEMS CHANGE

Changes that impact all elements of an organization, institution, or system, including culture, structures, policies, rules, programs, staffing and the allocation of resources.

### EQUITY

Fair access to resources and opportunities, full participation in the life and well being of the community, and self-determination in meeting fundamental needs.



Bad Heart Bull presents an earlier draft of the model to other community engagement practitioners.



## THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE TWIN CITIES AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

Minneapolis has the largest urban American Indian community in the nation. The Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) is a community development organization working to help their community thrive and to create community from the voices of American Indians. Yet, as Executive Director Jay Bad Heart Bull said at the Engaged Learning event, the community was still too divided years into the work.

“We saw a lot of the end points like housing and jobs in our community, but our community wasn’t laughing with one another, breaking bread and sharing stories,” Bad Heart Bull said. “We had to start by talking about healing, developing identity and reconnecting with our spirituality. We had to work on listening and asking community members ‘What do you want for yourselves? What are you hoping for in your community?’”

NACDI was able to use many of these elements of good community engagement to take the visions and dreams of the community members and develop the American Indian Community Blueprint, a comprehensive document that defines a vision for the future of the urban American Indian community of the Twin Cities. Bad Heart Bull said that NACDI knew it was doing the right thing when the organization wasn’t dictating the outcomes. “The community does the work,” he said. “We are there to facilitate the process.”



African Immigrant  
Services Executive  
Director Abdullah  
Kiatamba and East  
Side Prosperity  
Campaign Program  
Director Mikael  
Carlson discuss en-  
gagement practices in  
their communities.



## WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEADS TO SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES

Community engagement creates more sustainable, long-term progress for communities because it is rooted in relationships. Many organizations driving a specific issue or campaign agenda build transactional relationships, which are less personal and built specifically to obtain a desired result. Authentic community engagement, on the other hand, depends on developing a relational connection to the community that is focused on achieving long-term results rather than short-term gains. As one event attendee said, “It can’t just be about a project, because projects end.”

This is particularly true because in most community-based organizations, projects are often dictated by funding sources. It can become easy for a project-focused organization to be driven by transactional metrics such as turning people out to meetings, rather than relationship-focused strategies that build power over time.

Because it is so focused on developing relationships and leadership within the community, good community engagement takes more time and is a constant learning process. It does not end, it is not linear and it is never perfect. But it keeps communities moving forward. The organizations involved in the Building the Field of Community Engagement initiative are experts in many ways, but they are quick to offer that they will never be done learning about it.

To join the Building the Field partners in learning more about this dynamic, challenging field, please watch the short film on community engagement, *Community at the Center*, and attend the next Engaged Learning event *Assess Your Work: The Essentials of Community Engagement* at 9 am on Wednesday, June 25 (location TBD). Please visit <http://nexuscp.org/our-work/building-the-field-of-community-engagement/> for details. For more information, contact Janice Barbee at [janicegwb@yahoo.com](mailto:janicegwb@yahoo.com) or Theresa Gardella at [tgardella@nexuscp.org](mailto:tgardella@nexuscp.org).





# PARTNERS

**CASA DE ESPERANZA** is a national organization that puts community engagement at the strategic center of its local and national work to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. [www.casadeesperanza.org](http://www.casadeesperanza.org)

**THE CULTURAL WELLNESS CENTER** convenes and engages cultural communities to rediscover the power of culture and document this process for the redevelopment and healing of individuals, families and communities. [www.ppcwc.org](http://www.ppcwc.org)

**HOPE COMMUNITY** is a housing and community engagement organization that engages hundreds of diverse kids and adults each year to build stronger futures for themselves and their community through leadership, learning, organizing and community building. [www.hope-community.org](http://www.hope-community.org)

**LYNDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION** is a diverse, community-driven organization that brings people together to work on common issues to ensure all community members live, work and play in a safe, vibrant and sustainable community. [www.lyndale.org](http://www.lyndale.org)

**THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE** focuses on building a vibrant and thriving Native community through engagement, organizing and development work. [www.nacdi.org](http://www.nacdi.org)

**NEXUS COMMUNITY PARTNERS** is a community building intermediary that supports initiatives and organizations advancing sustainable change by promoting community engagement, asset development and wealth building. [www.nexuscp.org](http://www.nexuscp.org)

*Please contact any of the organizations above if you'd like support developing or strengthening your community engagement work.*