

Notes from the Equity in Clean Energy: Equitable Community Engagement Webinar Q&A Sessions

The document below reflects the key discussions points covered during the [Equitable Community Engagement](#) webinar breakout room conversations. The document has been divided into the three sessions our guest speakers facilitated and includes the questions asked by attendees and the answers provided by guest speakers.

Niri's Breakout Room (Natick, MA)

Niri was a Climate Equity Community Liaison for Natick.

Question: I wanted to hear more about your background and work with Natick. I am a volunteer in Natick and planning to become a heat pump coach. [I] wanted to hear potential connections and outreach to those who could benefit but have barriers.

- **Answer:** Focused community engagement [is important], be intentional about people you're engaging. Those you want to engage the most are often least accessible. [You] want to focus on who has the most to gain and who would be impacted most (e.g., energy savings). To reach people of different income groups: where does that community normally go to (e.g., childcare centers, YMCA, etc.) find out where they go for work/play/shop/get groceries, etc. Where do people congregate? This is a longer, slower approach, and works in every aspect.

Question: How do I navigate different types of engagement for different groups and move past potentially contentious history to work together?

- **Answer:** First acknowledge legitimacy in having those feelings, declare you know where they're coming from. Can't brush this off or will have trust issues. Let them know their concerns are legitimate. Can get better, but the only way is for them to be part of the process. Going to continue not being great/broken, if not in process of building them. Need to be part of designing the campaign, when [you have] meetings, build and change the language based on groups' feedback. Important to build the messaging together. Also compensating people is really important.

Question: The people most impacted need to be part of the process. How to define "most impacted" – what considerations to be mindful of?

- **Answer:** Changes based on scenario. If climate equity, then it's science (e.g., heat maps). Need to have data to prove who is being most impacted.

Question: [How do you get] meaningful input?

- **Answer:** Sounds simple but listen. Entering conversations, make [sure] people feel heard, and they'll be more accepting of what you have to say. When you craft a message and hear what they have to say. What are their problems? People don't see the same things in the same way. How climate impacts you doesn't make a difference to me; break down big global topics and

discuss how it has impacts to daily lives (e.g., work outdoors, live in basement, don't have AC, etc.)

- Modes of engagement: quality over quantity – while we worked on the project, the best and deepest work was when we had deep climate talks. Looking at people – make sure everyone at the table is different from who you are. People tend to want to have lots of responses but deeper is more valuable – takes a while to get deep, not just numbers. Also, transparency of where this is going, who is going to hear this, how will this impact change? Etc. Make sure voices are not getting lost – [while] not promising the world, not furthering trust issues. Don't overpromise.

Question: Do you identify groups you want to work with? Identify leaders?

- **Answer:** Hard question, if we knew all of that, [we] wouldn't be in this situation. This is a good start. We start like that by trying to get groups who are not heard. Start small, then groups identify [other groups], "hey you know who else should be here?" And move forward. [Figure out] why don't they feel comfortable? Language access? No one looks like them?

Question: [Do you] have experience using mapping tools? [Have you ever] used EPA's EJ tools to deal with specific issues?

- **Answer:** It's two parts -- one is the data, MAPC has amazing maps that can overlay and identify populations. But also 2) if you sit down and have discussions with the town, you know. You can step into an area and see. When you step into an environment different from your neighborhood. Some of it is data, other is just being aware.

Marlees and Lindsay's Breakout Room (Cambridge, MA)

Marlees is the Community Engagement Manager for the City of Cambridge's Community Development Department (CDD) and Lindsay is one of two Co-Leaders for the Community Engagement Team (CET) for the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) for the City of Cambridge.

Question: For public meetings, about spaces and places, how can you communicate and make spaces welcoming? Communicate expectations about the meeting structure?

Answer:

- Importance of pausing, thinking about time frame
- They spend a lot of time with their outreach worker teams on the prep
- Advice is given often; you will need more time for that
- Find where people are gathered; consider shifting location and bringing the meeting to them
 - Example: outreach at a place of worship
- Walk through each step that will happen in a process
- Remove as many barriers as you can
- Think about limitations of engagement tools
 - Harm reduction - how to make public meetings more inclusive and more welcoming
 - What does it mean to be welcoming and what do we need to feel to make it feel better

- Sometimes that can be having a familiar face there

Question: Going where people are vs. imposing yourself on a meeting or event that is for another purpose - how [do you] navigate that? Any tips on what has worked or not worked?

Answer:

- Piece around collaboration and transparency
- Try to think about value add in a space - what are we bringing
 - For youth, could be teaching them about planning
 - Or bringing expertise on resources families need (e.g., a resource on all the parks with bathrooms for a family)
- Also, about relationship building - "relationships go at the speed of trust" - take time to build this
- Long-term relationship rather than transactional relationship

Question: How [do we] make projects youth inviting?

Answer:

- Focus groups
- Bringing treats or something to take away afterwards
- Example of an event last spring with Middle School, High School, and adults
 - Interactive focus groups - food, go to where young people are (e.g., afterschool programs)
 - Follow-up is important too
- Framing: opportunity to give input even though you don't get to vote
- It is important to consider who is coming into a space, how to dress (t-shirts), play basketball at the end, listen to what they care about to build a relationship, etc.
- Be honest and transparent; talk casually to build a relationship

Question: How do you prioritize your resources to have the greatest impact? (e.g., translation, childcare) Advice for private consultants coming in?

Answer:

- Outreach workers have a list of people they can connect with
- Ensure translations are high quality
- Translate into languages you have outreach workers for
- Ask who will be accessing this information and what language makes sense
- Ideal to go to a community and ask what will be needed
- Example: multiple interpreters at one focus group does not work; focus on a single language at a time
- Many consultants coming in at CDD - urgency and timeline; build in enough time for engagement that will work for community members
- Consider city calendar, major religious holidays
- Come in with a listening ear and time to do listening

Gail's Breakout Room (Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation)

Gail is the Executive Director of Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation.

Question: [I am] interested in [more] details on the energy ambassador and literacy programs.

Answer:

- Engage (and pay) folks who know neighbors really well. Head of the neighborhood associations.
 - Staff does the training with ambassadors, so they know the breadth and depth of programs that are available.
 - Staff provide support to ambassadors as they go out and do tabling or attend block parties.
- They have interacted with several 100 people so far but are still trying to get people to take advantage of the retrofits. Getting the information doesn't translate into people doing the program.
- Create an equity army –
 - Cultivate a relationship with community -- meeting their needs, then engaging them in being part of advocacy work.
 - Convert those who have met their service needs into part of the army for advocacy and change.

Question: [How have you created] informal feedback loops?

Answer:

- They got approached by the city about being the first neighborhood in the region to experience black outs. [Were] asked to help identify locations for places for people to go cool off when the power goes off.
 - CSNDC participated but pushed back – how can we change things, so we are not the first neighborhood to lose power?
- Example from anti-racism, equity army academy – just did the second cohort. Change the language for how we talk about the class, anti-racism language didn't resonate with participants of color. Also, don't do it in person in the winter.

Question: I'd like to hear more about the energy literacy curriculum.

Answer:

- Energy Literacy – this is a new model that they are launching. Not much information to share yet but send Gail an email and she can connect you with her staff who will be running it for more!

Question: How much do you provide for stipends?

Answer:

- Living wage policy for all staff, \$33-35/hr.
- Commitment to pay more than minimum wage for ambassadors - \$18/hr.
- \$200 1x payment for attending 4 classes
 - Gail notes that she joined a 4-class training with MPHA and the 25 folks attending the training were "buzzing" and really engaged.
 - The stipend may have kicked the engagement into action, but these were clearly interested folks.

Question for Attendees: What are others doing?

Answer:

- Pittsfield: [Are] going door-to-door making people aware of MASS Save. Around 40% of people had never heard of it before.
 - Did mapping of homeowner-occupied homes. Issue with absentee landlords. Focus on local landlords or owner-occupants, then recorded on map of who wasn't interested, who said come back, who thought the work wouldn't apply to them.
 - This has informed our work since, brought it to the energy efficiency advisory committee. Hoping it will inform MASS Save to move away from being run by the energy companies.
 - Many were interested but all the outreach had appealed to people who were already well-served.
- What Eversource has been doing to make things more accessible: Language access – from the utility, trying to figure out what languages they need to reach out in. Trying to use QR forms and other types of hand-held [devices].

Question: We've thought about canvassing too but are worried about trust because there are so many shady companies going door to door. Did your folks wear t-shirts or somehow identify themselves as being from a community group?

Answer:

- Answered by another attendee: [They] have used badges and lanyards in their door-to-door energy outreach; have simple handouts about who the organization was for their outreach team to use