![RTI International logo]

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Transformative Research Unit for Equity

Contributors to this document
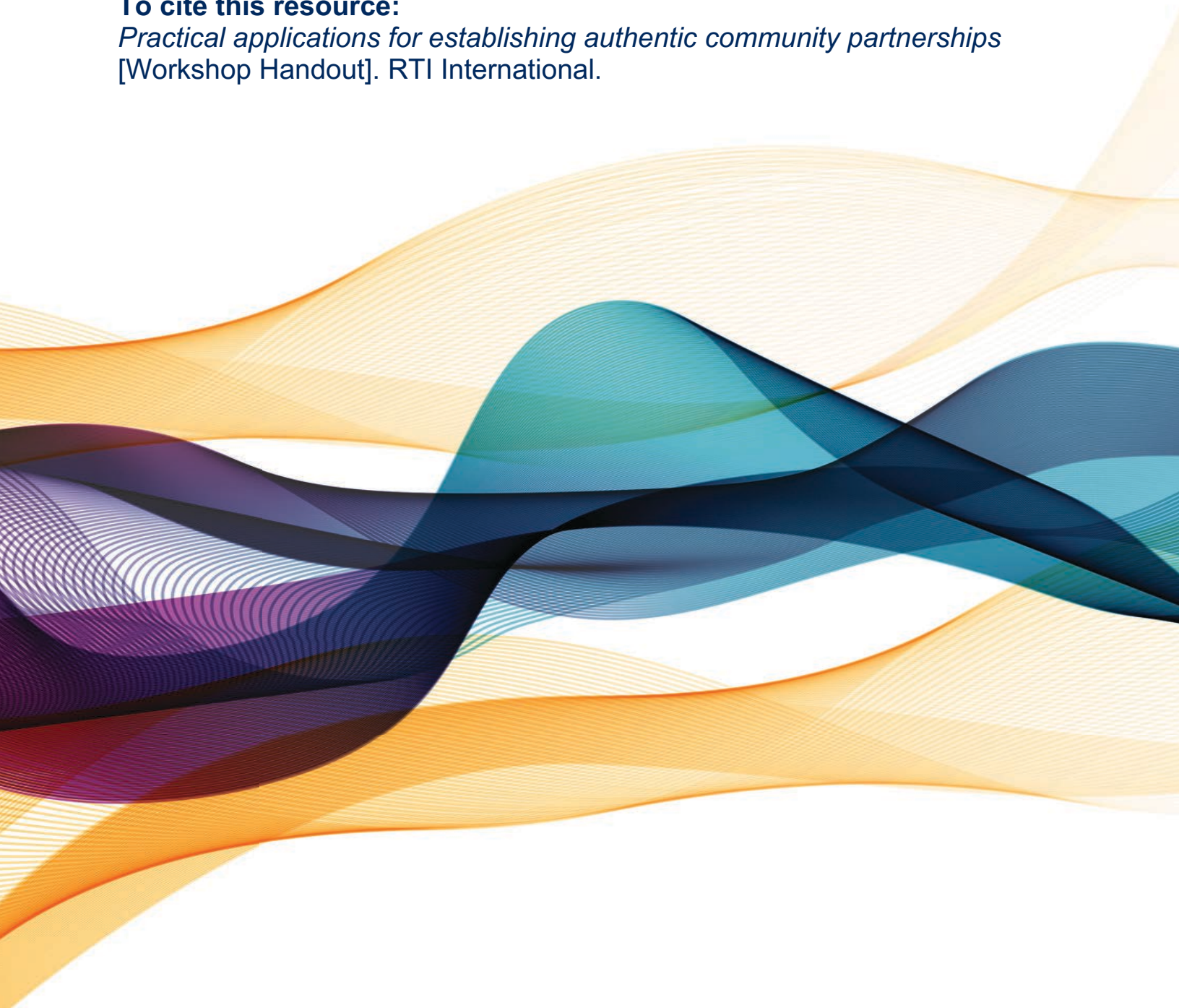Tatiana Bustos, Ph.D.
Janelle Armstrong-Brown, Ph.D.
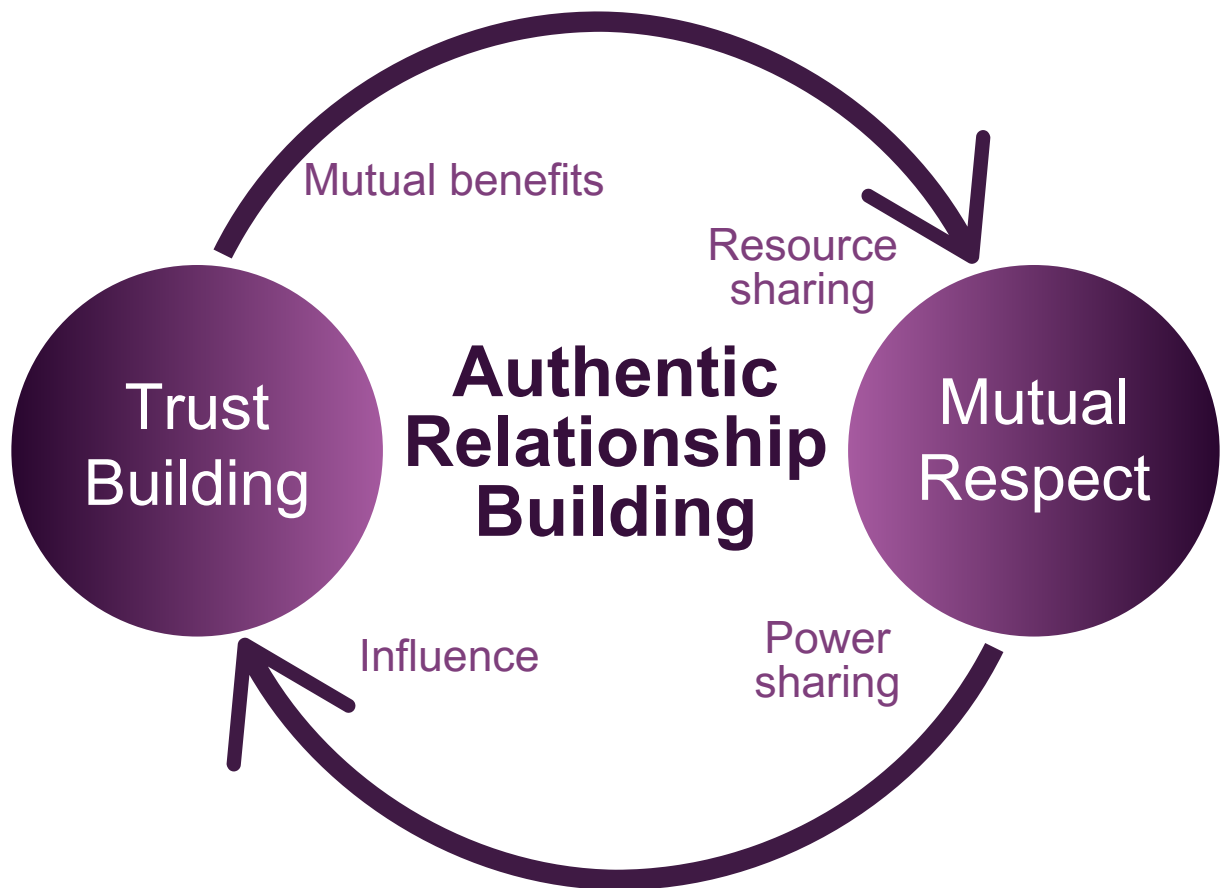Daniela Pineda, Ph.D.
Graphic design by Brittany Wood

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Key Steps to Get Started

Establishing Authentic Community Partnerships for Your Project

Mutual benefits

Resource sharing

Trust Building

Authentic Relationship Building

Mutual Respect

Influence

Power sharing

Remember that establishing authentic community partnerships requires that we start with **trust building and mutual respect.** Below are some questions to guide your thinking as you are planning for engagement.

- How have we established mutual benefits? Who benefits and how? Are we mutually vulnerable?
- What is the extent of decision making involving community partners? Who has the power to decide?
- What level of influence will community partners have on the work?
- What kind of resources will be beneficial to share and ensure community partners can make informed decisions?

Establishing Authentic Community Partnerships for Your Project

To start applying these concepts into your work, it's critical to think about why engaging communities in this project is important. Then, reflect on what kind of shifts are needed to ensure their engagement is meaningful throughout the process.
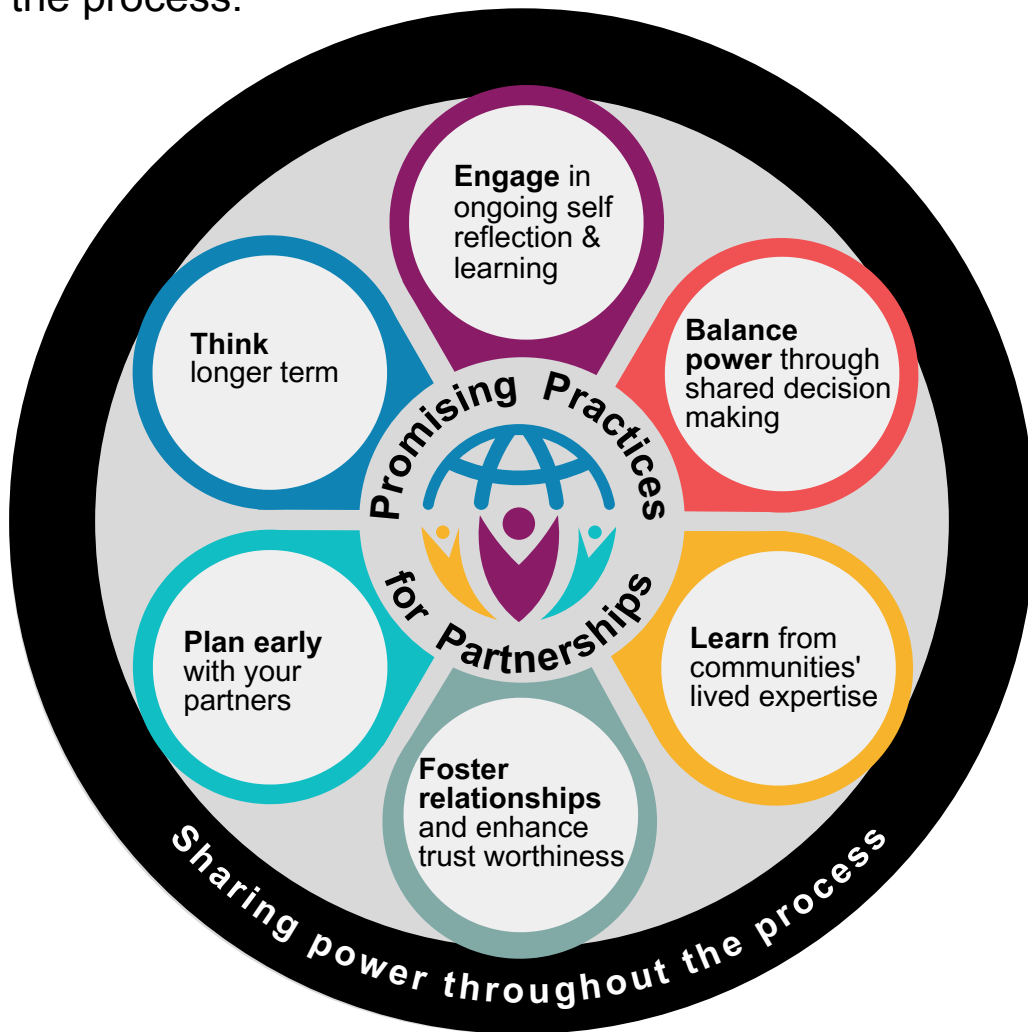
Start with your **why** (*why is it important to engage community partners in your work*)?

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Promising Practices for Establishing Authentic & Equitable Community Partnerships

Engage in ongoing self reflection and learning

- Engage in ongoing self reflections to consider how bias, privilege, and power influences community engagement
- Take the time to learn about communities to understand the importance of relationship building

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Balance power through shared decision-making

- Biases should be managed and mitigated throughout the process.
- Balance how decisions are made and consider whether community partners have a meaningful contribution to them.
- Make changes as needed to ensure power is shared and shifted, where appropriate

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Learn from communities' lived expertise

- Challenge mental models about what constitutes "expertise" and acknowledge communities' lived experiences as quality evidence.
- Understand key issues and policies impacting communities from their perspectives.

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Promising Practices for Establishing Authentic & Equitable Community Partnerships

Foster relationships and enhance trust worthiness

- Center trust building in community partnerships
- Focus on relationship-building to ensure partnership is not transactional
- Learn to navigate conflicts with compromise

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Plan early with your partners

- Include community partners in your project planning and budget
- Identify roles and responsibilities with transparency in the design process.
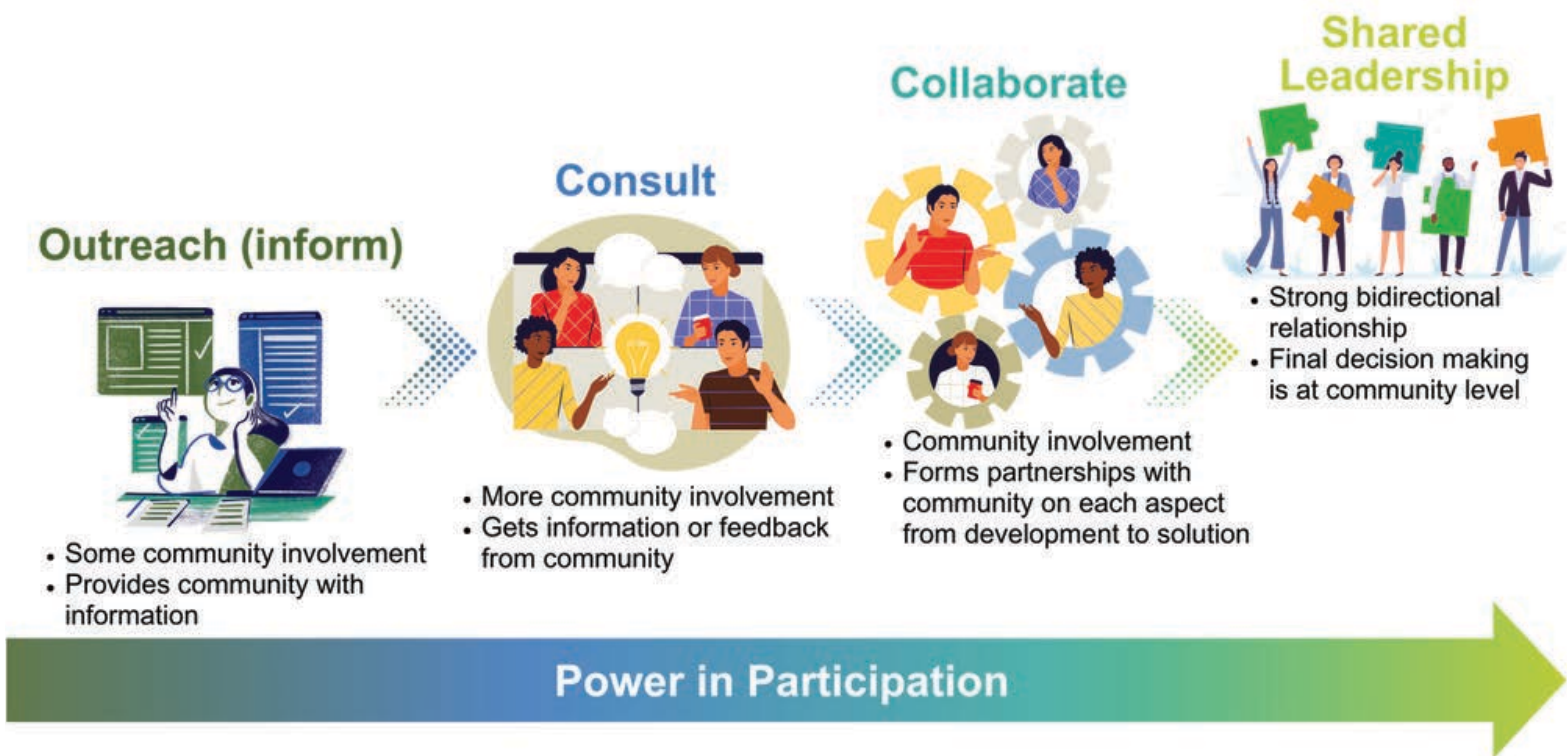- Plan to involve community partners throughout the project cycle

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Think longer term

- View the partnership as a longer term opportunity to continue building relationships and seeking new opportunities in the future
- Evaluate engagement process for ongoing improvements to the partnership
- Effective, transparent communication and trust are essential to achieve sustainable community partnerships.

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Continuum of Community Engagement

Understand Community Engagement as a Continuum

Community engagement can vary across a continuum that carries implications for power in participation. Take a moment to review the Community Engagement Continuum. Think about where you are currently engaging communities in your work.

Outreach (inform)
- Some community involvement
- Provides community with information

Consult
- More community involvement
- Gets information or feedback from community

Collaborate
- Community involvement
- Forms partnerships with community on each aspect from development to solution

Shared Leadership
- Strong bidirectional relationship
- Final decision making is at community level

Power in Participation

Reflect on how your project design will shift if you engage partners throughout the project cycle. What needs to change?

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Which Communities to Engage?

Communities are part of a system. The graphic to the right illustrates how different partners may have different roles and perspectives that are essential to understanding the full story.

Create a list of all key interestholders who are most directly impacted AND have specific interests in the project. What perspectives would they bring?

those deciding how changes and resources are used

those supporting at the local level

those providing services

those experiencing the problem

Perspectives from those experiencing the problem	**Perspectives from those providing services**

Perspectives from those supporting at the local level	**Perspectives from those deciding how changes and resources are used**

Reflection: Community decision-making in project planning & implementation

Use the checkboxes to mark where you are in each phase of your project across the continuum. Take time to reflect on steps you can take to incorporate partners meaningfully & move your work towards **Shared Leadership**.

	Outreach (Inform)	Consult	Collaborate (Partnership)	Shared Leadership (Community Ownership)
Program goals or questions	Based on funding priorities and are shared ☐	Community provide input in identifying locally relevant issues ☐	Both parties identify issues of importance ☐	Full participation of Community in identifying issues of greatest importance. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in program goals or questions:

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Program Design	Design based entirely on scientific rigor and feasibility without input of the community. Community is informed of the plan. ☐	Share design with Community and ask for feedback. ☐	Work with Community to ensure project design is tailored to context. ☐	Community intimately involved with project design. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in program design:

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Assessment design	Instruments adopted/adapted from other projects or created by program staff. Shared with Community, but not for feedback. ☐	Develop instruments and share with Community for feedback. ☐	Co-develop instruments with Community to ensure alignment with context. ☐	Creation of data collection instruments are led by Community and grounded in cultural context. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in assessment design:

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Reflection: Community decision-making in project planning & implementation

Use the checkboxes to mark where you are in each phase of your project across the continuum. Take time to reflect on steps you can take to incorporate partners meaningfully & move your work towards **Shared Leadership**.

Data collection	Only conducted by program staff or individuals with no connection to the Community ☐	Community provide input on aspects data collection, but not involved with data collection. ☐	Community involved in some aspects of data collection. ☐	Conducted by members of the community, to the extent possible based on available skill sets. Focus on capacity building. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in data collection:

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Analysis & Interpretation	Program staff own the data, conduct analysis, interpret the findings and develop recommendations. ☐	Share results of analysis with community members for comments. ☐	Data is shared; Both parties work together to interpret results and develop recommendations. ☐	Community leads analysis, interpretation of results and development of recommendations, with program staff support. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in analysis & interpretation:

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Share results	Results given and directed towards main client or funder. ☐	Results shared out to the Community. ☐	Community assist to identify appropriate venues to disseminate results and appropriate formats. ☐	Community leads in the creation of deliverables and dissemination venues. ☐

Steps I can take to move toward Shared Leadership in sharing results:

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Action Planning

Action Item 1	
Actions (what I/we will do to engage partners inclusively in projects)	
What are known tensions/tradeoffs?	
Who should be involved?	
What resources are available? What might you need?	
What are short-, medium-, and long-term steps to take?	
How will we measure success?	
What is a specific first step to take?	

Action Item 2	
Actions (what I/we will do to engage partners inclusively in projects)	
What are known tensions/tradeoffs?	
Who should be involved?	
What resources are available? What might you need?	
What are short-, medium-, and long-term steps to take?	
How will we measure success?	
What is a specific first step to take?	

Additional resources

Click on the circles below to see additional resources for establishing authentic community partnerships.

Full links listed on page 13

"Good solid relationships make programs work"

Model for Community Change and Improvement

Elements of an Authentic Partnership

Facilitation guide

Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities

The Power of Purpose: Understanding what Motivates Community Partners in Evaluation and Research

Community Trust And Relationships: The Key For Strengthening Public Health Systems

Community Planning Toolkit

Reciprocal Research: A Guidebook to Centering Community in Partnerships with Indigenous Nations

Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships

Engaging and Maintaining Community Involvement

Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement

Additional resources
Full links for additional resources are listed below

Chapter 1. Our Model for Community Change and Improvement | Section 11. Participatory Evaluation | Main Section | Community Tool Box | https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/model-for-community-change-and-improvement/participatory-evaluation/main

Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities | https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/community-engagement-guide-for-sustainable-communities

Community Planning Toolkit | www.communityplanningtoolkit.org

Community Trust and Relationships: The Key for Strengthening Public Health Systems. | de Guia, S., & Novais, A. P. (2023). Health Affairs. https://doi.org/10.1377/forefront.20230224.710305

Elements of an Authentic Partnership. | CCPH Board of Directors. Position Statement on Authentic Partnerships. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2013.

Engaging and Maintaining Community Involvement. | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. (2015, June 25). Chapter 5: Engaging and maintaining community involvement. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pce_challenges_engaging.html

Facilitation guide | https://aapip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/facilitation_guide_final.pdf)

Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement. | Shakesprere, J., Mizota, M., Martinez, R., Daly, H., & Falkenburger, E. (2021, October). https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104935/fostering-partnerships-for-community-engagement_0.pdf

"Good solid relationships make programs work": A mixed methods assessment of determinants to community research partnerships in Flint, MI | https://www.rti.org/publication/good-solid-relationships-make-programs-work-mixed-methods-assessment-determinants-community-research-partnerships-flint-mi

Reciprocal Research: A Guidebook to Centering Community in Partnerships with Indigenous Nations. | Poitra, C., Kolonich, A., Mitchell, A. E., Proctor, E., Shirley, A., Baier, A.& LaPensée, E. (2021). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Native American Institute.

The Power of Purpose: Understanding what Motivates Community Partners in Evaluation and Research | https://www.rti.org/insights/motivate-community-engagement-research

Transformative Research Unit for Equity (TRUE)

We transform research practices and mindsets to reimagine and create systems that advance equity and social justice.

TRUE focuses on **systemic change** in 4 intersecting areas

EDUCATION SYSTEM REPAIR

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HEALING

COMMUNITY

HEALTH EQUITY

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & INFRASTRUCTURE EQUITY

How can you work with TRUE?

Research & Evaluation

We conduct research and evaluation in ways that center principles of diversity, inclusion, and equity (scan QR Code to read the full framework) to ensure our work enables our clients and communities to use actionable results for social justice. Our work aims to understand how institutions undermine equity and create solutions for systems change.

The Science of Community Engagement

We prioritize community engagement at all phases of research and evaluation, promoting standards informed by evidence and cultural community contexts that embed values of equity, diversity, and inclusion and belonging as well as bridge (or translate) practice-based evidence with research evidence.

Strategic Advising, Training & Technical Assistance

We offer a range of support including initial training and implementation of transformational research methods, assessing existing programs and initiatives, and developing new strategies. We develop tailored in-person and virtual learning opportunities for clients, project partners and researchers on how to center equity in their work. We use best practices in facilitation and adult learning to create interactive learning environments driven by practical application.

Narrative Change Research

Informed by research and in partnership with community, we develop, curate, disseminate, and evaluate multi-platform stories that drive systems-level changed. We amplify narratives that offer insight to communities, policymakers, and practitioners working to advance justice. Scan the QR code to see an example of our work.

https://www.rti.org/true

TRUE@rti.org

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