

# Health Equity Zones

## Community Participation Guide

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This guide describes outreach, meeting accessibility, and communication strategies implemented by the Health Equity Zones Initiative. It offers lessons learned and considerations for local and state government agencies interested in strengthening community participation. It was drafted by community members and Department of Health (DOH) staff, who have co-created the initiative together over the last three years.

Written by  
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# Community Participation

Community participation is foundational to the Health Equity Zones (HEZ), a place-based initiative that centers community-led decision-making by those most impacted by health inequities. We believe that greater community participation leads to more voices, perspectives, and lived experiences represented in decision-making. Engaging communities and supporting their leadership requires intentional planning and preparation to remove barriers to participation. A list of potential barriers to participation can be found in Appendix A.

While we focus on lessons learned from community participation in Health Equity Zones, there are other published resources on community engagement and accessibility that can be referenced for more comprehensive guidance, including the [DOH Community Engagement Guide](#).

## Outreach and Communication

The HEZ Initiative engaged community members as trusted messengers in outreach and communications for the zone selection process. An outreach subcommittee of the Community Advisory Council (CAC) was formed where community members developed relevant messaging, identified effective strategies, and disseminated information through their networks. Communication materials, such as flyers were reviewed by members of the subcommittee to assess whether the visuals and information resonated. Community input on outreach strategies highlighted the importance of in-person events and meeting people where they are in natural community gathering places (see Appendix B).

### Trusted Messengers

Trusted messengers are individuals who are viewed as trustworthy and credible in their communities - they are often themselves members of the community and serve as connectors with government agencies. They are better able to mobilize within their communities and likely already have relationships with other people who can help share information. In addition to relational skills, trusted messengers often have language skills to communicate information in the preferred language of the community.

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# Meeting Accessibility

The CAC and Community Workgroup (CW) held a combination of virtual and hybrid meetings over three years. Accessibility is a key consideration when organizing meetings to ensure everyone who wants to participate can do so easily. Hybrid meetings require foresight, materials, and planning to ensure community members attending virtually can engage with in-person attendees and participate in the activities. They offer an option for those who can't attend in-person meetings or prefer virtual meetings because they meet their access needs.

## Key Considerations

It is important to consider everything that may impact a person's ability to engage in a meeting, including those external to the actual meeting itself. A list of key considerations is included below, and a checklist and community partner poll for meeting planning can be found in Appendix C and D.



Holidays or time of year



Childcare options



Dietary restrictions and cultural observances



Access needs, both in-person and virtually



Hotel room accommodations



Travel accommodations, including the availability of travel advances



Translation and interpretation, including ASL and CART



Virtual options and recordings

# Hurdles & Learnings

Throughout the process of co-creating the HEZ Initiative and health equity zone selection process, staff experienced several moments that led to important learnings and points of reflection. The examples included below show hurdles we experienced along the way as well as the learnings that came from staff and community partner reflection.

## MEETING ENGAGEMENT

Virtual meetings can make relationship-building and collaboration more difficult and in-person meetings are not always possible due to cost. Center connection time (even if it is at the cost of time allocated to a different agenda item), hold smaller groups where participants can collaborate, and support community members gathering regionally in person.

### Meeting Engagement Example

CAC and CW members have continued to highlight the importance of in-person meetings in relationship building and collaboration. However, with members living across the state, HEZ supported relationship building by dedicating time in virtual group meetings for connection. This has included using a combination of ice melters, team building activities, one-on-ones, and open time to share about local community events or life updates. Through smaller subcommittees, community members had opportunities to meet more frequently and get to know each other while collaborating on focused projects. Some community members have met one-on-one in person for casual hangouts and others have expressed an interest in gathering regionally with coordination support from HEZ staff.

*“I really like the in-person stuff because you get to actually sit down with somebody and get a better connection. And spend a little more time during breaks and after the meeting. You don’t get that on Zoom.”*

*- Community Advisory Council Member*

# TIMELINES

Internal agency compensation and travel reimbursement timelines do not always align with community needs or expectations. Provide transparent information on timelines for processing compensation and reimbursement; ask community members about their circumstances and secure travel advances when needed; advocate for changes in processes that will strengthen community participation.

## Timelines Example

Prior to an in-person HEZ gathering, CAC and CW members completed a poll about access needs for travel and childcare preferences. Community members could indicate whether they preferred childcare on-site or reimbursement. For some, it was best to bring their children to the meeting or travel with their spouses to support childcare. After the gathering, there were months of delays in processing the reimbursements due to internal processes, which negatively impacted community members. For future in-person gatherings, community members have recommended travel advances for childcare, partnering with organizations who can provide childcare onsite, or timely reimbursement to allow community members with children to participate.

*"If we need childcare reimbursement, we can't wait. I make just enough to pay my bills. Bringing my child with me [to meetings] is easier because she's older, but that might not work for everyone. It's best to ask about each person's circumstances."*

*- Community Workgroup Member*



# STAFF CAPACITY

Low staff capacity and staffing changes can result in drop-offs in communication. Plan communication for periods of low capacity, partner with other programs or individuals who are attending relevant events and can bring program materials for outreach. Be transparent with community partners about capacity challenges.




## Staff Capacity Example

After reflecting on capacity limitations for outreach and communication, DOH staff focused on larger gatherings where people from around the state would be present to maximize our reach. During the Zone for Native Communities outreach phase, staff attended multiple gatherings of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians. When staff were not able to attend events in person, we partnered with other programs to send relevant informational flyers and supplies to support tabling. Repeated opportunities for engagement, where DOH is coming to the community rather than the other way around, creates greater program recognition and increases engagement.

*“A lot of the outreach we did was virtual, through social media, email, and word of mouth. In the future with more staff support, it would be really great to connect with folks in person and start building relationships early on.”*

*- Staff Member*



Outreach and communications ramp up when there are funding opportunities, rather than focusing on intentional relationship building over time. Create a communications plan that describes strategies for intentional relationship building, how to identify and support trusted messengers in sharing information regularly with their communities, and evaluation measures to assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

## INTENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Intentional Engagement Example

Members of the CAC and CW served as trusted messengers for zone selection. HEZ staff created an outreach toolkit that included talking points, flyers, email templates, and social media templates to support the sharing of information. The trusted messengers provided feedback on the content and design of outreach materials and made translation requests. This expanded the statewide reach of information and the effectiveness of the materials. For the Zone for Native Communities, members of the Indigenous Advisory Panel also served as trusted messengers, in addition to individuals staff met at in-person events who helped to share back information with their communities. Trusted messengers were invited to complete a survey on who they shared information with to capture the impact of statewide outreach efforts.

*“One of the things I really appreciate is sharing with different partners in the community who might not have the bandwidth to participate in meetings, and to be an advocate by dispersing that information broadly in my community.”*

*-Community Workgroup Member*



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# Community Partner Key Takeaways

The following key takeaways summarize community partner perspectives on outreach, meeting accessibility, and communications, and offer recommendations for how local and state government agencies can improve community participation.



Establish participation expectations and commitments with community partners so there is group agreement on how to collaborate with each other.



Meet one-on-one with community partners to build stronger relationships and identify support needs for their participation.



Create meaningful opportunities for community participation, where participants can drive decision-making, step into leadership roles, or build skills.



Identify and support trusted messengers in mobilizing within their communities and amplifying communications.



Support relationship-building among community partners in person and virtually to create a collective sense of purpose and unity that will strengthen participation long term.



Identify meeting times with community partners and be open to meeting outside of traditional work hours.



Continue to check in and invite feedback from community members to ensure they feel supported and heard in the process.

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# Appendix A

## Community Participation Barriers

-  Time of meeting
-  Location of meeting
-  Transportation cost and/or availability
-  Childcare cost and/or availability
-  Family care cost and/or availability
-  Cultural or religious observances
-  Translation and interpretation
-  Schools' breaks and vacations
-  Accessibility of information
-  Literacy
-  Government distrust
-  Digital access and/or capability
-  Disability accommodations

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# Appendix B

## Community Outreach Recommendations



Engage communities using multiple channels in-person and virtually, such as listening sessions, flyers, radio, newspapers, social media, email, phone calls, and website.



Identify trusted messengers, community leaders, and grassroots organizations that communities regard as reliable sources to disseminate information.



Identify “bridgers” who connect community members to resources and often liaise with government agencies, such as healthcare or social service providers, to support outreach.



Hold in-person outreach at natural community gathering places, including libraries, grocery stores, schools, and faith and cultural centers.



Invite input from communities while doing outreach so they feel more invested to participate, for example through surveys, focus groups, or interviews.

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# Appendix C

## Meeting Planning Checklist

### Tasks to spread out in the 3 months prior

Confirm administrative timeline for:

- Hotel and meeting space reservation and contracting
- Rooming list
- Approval packet for non-employee travel
- Meal-related details for hotel or caterer

Identify and respond to community member access needs:

- Communicate early on to community members about family care support available
- Send out preliminary poll to gather travel details from community members
  - Include details that will be needed for contracting the meeting space
  - Include accessibility questions in the poll
- Create agenda in collaboration with community members
  - Support community members in taking on leadership and facilitation roles for the meeting
  - Plan activities that can incorporate remote attendees online

### Four Weeks Before

- Finalize agenda
- Order any large, printed materials or posters
- Confirm dietary restrictions and needs with hotel and/or caterer

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## Three Weeks Before

- Place order for any supplies
- Confirm mailing addresses for any community members attending remotely

## Two Weeks Before

- Send reminder email to community members, include
  - Individual travel itinerary
  - Agenda
  - Community compensation information
  - Important things to know about state supported travel

## Week Before

- Print materials (agenda, activity sheets, etc.)
- Mail materials to remote attendees

## Week of Event

- Double check supplies
- Final planning meeting
- Send meeting reminder with agenda and Zoom info

# Day of Event

## Logistics

- Confirm name and contact number of site coordinator
- Confirm meal schedule
- Confirm coffee service, water and snacks in room
- Make any final requests of site coordinator
- Start setting up room 1 hour prior to event start
- Run a tech check for projector, lights, Zoom
- Test microphones and speakers and set sound levels for in the room participants and remote participants
- Set up each seat with supplies for each participant

## Meeting roles

- Facilitator(s)
- Notetaker/discussion summarizer
- Zoom facilitator/moderator
- Event point person (for hotel staff to communicate with)

## Supplies

- Large sticky notes
- Small sticky notes
- Highlighters
- Pens
- Notebooks
- Binders with meeting materials
- Snacks
- Charger
- Power strip
- Laptop

## Optional

- Spare chargers for different types of phones
- Screen extender or portable monitor for laptop
- Individual disposable headsets for any in-person participants who are connecting to Zoom participants
- Power strip
- Fidgets, pipe cleaners, puzzles

# Appendix D

## Meeting Poll Questions

*This sheet is an example of the questions and text that HEZ includes in pre-meeting polls to gather the necessary planning information and details to support in-person community member participation. This is not an exhaustive example, and we adapt our questions after each meeting in response to feedback from attendees. The questions are presented in plain text format so that they can easily be copied into an online poll or form. Text in boxes is not indented to be included in the form. Highlighted text in all capital letters is intended to be individualized based on the meeting.*

### **MEETING NAME, DATE, PURPOSE**

Please complete this form if you are planning to attend (even if you live in the area). The following questions will ask for details needed to create travel authorizations. Travel authorizations allow us to reimburse costs associated with approved meals, mileage, and childcare that occur during the meeting.

### **Reimbursable Costs**

Pre-authorized expenses associated with travel, meals, eligible family care, and lodging for individuals travelling more than 50 miles or participating in both all-day gathering days will be covered. Eligible travelers can choose to stay at the hotel the evening of **DATE – EVENING** before the first day and depart the morning of **DATE – MORNING** after the second day if preferred. Breakfast and lunch will be provided on each meeting day for all participants. Dinners will be on your own and costs are reimbursable for those who are not commuting daily.

### **Community Compensation**

All attendees (whose travel and/or time is not covered by their employer or another organization) will receive a \$200 stipend per-meeting day for their participation. Travel day stipends are also capped at \$200.

**Name**

**Best way to contact you to confirm plans**

**Phone**

**Email**

**Are you able to attend the workdays on  
WORKDAY 1 date and WORKDAY 1 date?**

Yes – in person

Yes – hybrid

If hybrid which day in person? Which day virtually?

Yes – virtually

No – these days do not work at all

*Most online/form platforms will give you the option to create an “if then” flow for this question. If they select the option, they are autodirected to then fill out the follow-up question.*

**What day/time do you plan on travelling to MEETING LOCATION ADDRESS?**

**DATE PRIOR TO MEETING** (afternoon/afternoon arrival)

**DATE PRIOR TO MEETING** (afternoon/evening, evening arrival)

**DATE OF MEETING** (morning, morning arrival)

Other

**What evenings will you need a hotel room at the hotel?**

**DATE**

**DATE**

**DATE**

I do not need a room and plan to commute back and forth to my home (please note that if you live within 30 miles of the meeting location this may affect reimbursement).

**What day/time do you plan to depart after the workdays?**

**DATE** (evening departure)

**DATE** (morning departure)

Other



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### **How do you plan to travel?**

Airplane \*Please note that airline tickets will be booked on your behalf by DOH using the state contract.\*

Train \*Please note that train tickets will be booked on your behalf by DOH using the state contract.\*

Personal car \*mileage is reimbursed at \$0.XX per mile\*

Other

### **Will you need a rental vehicle? \*Please note that this will need to be booked on your behalf by DOH using the state contract.\***

Yes, I will need a rental vehicle to drive from my home address to our meeting location.

Yes, I will need a rental vehicle to drive local mileage from the airport to our meeting location.

No, I will not need a rental vehicle at all.

### **Do you plan to use rideshare vehicles or taxis for any part of your trip?**

Yes

No

### **What time of day should we look for tickets for train or plane?**

N/A I am not traveling by train or plane

Early morning (before 6:00 AM)

Morning (6:00 AM – 10:00 AM)

Midday (10:00 AM – 2:00 PM)

Afternoon (2:00 PM – 6:00 PM)

Evening (6:00 PM – 10:00 PM)

I am fine with any time, just let me know

### **Departing address / city / county**

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**Do you already have a Statewide Vendor/Payee Number? (SVN#)** \*Note that a SVN# is not needed and you can elect to use your Social Security Number instead of a SVN# for the travel pre-authorization paperwork.\*

Yes

SVN:

No

I don't know

**If you do not already have a SVN# are you interested in learning more about how to apply for one?**

Yes, please send me instructions on how to apply

No

Not sure, I would like more information

*The following questions should be a "long answer" format*

**Do you have any food restrictions that we should know about?** \*Please include allergies, religious, cultural, or traditional restrictions or guidelines, and any other food related information that you would like us to know about as we plan.

**Do you have any accommodation needs that we should inform the airline, train, rental car company, or hotel about?** \*These include, but are not limited to, access needs (examples: wheelchair accessible, no stairs, short walking distances to meeting room), environment needs (dimmer lighting, lower sounds), or any other needs that you feel comfortable sharing.\*

**Will you need to pay for family care during the gathering days?** \*Family care can be for a child, elder, or other dependent for whom you are the primary caregiver.\*

**Is there any other information around your travel needs that you would like to share?**