



## September 10, 2025 Community Collaborative Meeting

### Agenda

- 3:32 Welcome, Land and Labor Acknowledgement
- 3:35 Just Futures: A Model for Participatory Decision-Making
- 4:15 Q&A with new Secretary of Health Dennis Worsham
- 4:55 Next Meeting and Close

Meeting slides are available on WaPortal: <https://waportal.org/partners/community-collaborative/meeting-notes-and-slides>

### Meeting Recap

#### Welcome and Land and Labor Acknowledgement

The session opened with the song *Where is the Love* by the Black Eyed Peas, chosen to invite reflection on compassion and collective humanity. Cyril Walrond, community leader and DOH Thought Partner, welcomed participants and acknowledged the difficult context in which the meeting took place. Cyril shared his personal grounding, identifying as a husband, son, brother, community member, and friend. He also spoke from lived experience as a formerly incarcerated person, reminding participants that many in the Collaborative bring multiple, complex identities. “Our work is not for accolades or acknowledgements,” he reflected, “but to assert humanity in systems that have too often dehumanized us”. He spoke candidly about the murder of Charlie Kirk and reminded the group that all life is sacred, regardless of political affiliation, race, gender, orientation, immigration status, or socioeconomic position.

A land and labor acknowledgment followed, honoring the Coast Salish and other Native peoples who have stewarded these lands for generations despite systemic erasure. Cyril uplifted Indigenous sovereignty over land, language, and culture, and named the ongoing harms of slavery, Jim Crow, imprisonment, and anti-Black racism endured by descendants of enslaved Africans. He underscored Washington State’s complicity in white supremacy and affirmed the Collaborative’s commitment to uplifting historically marginalized voices.



## Just Futures Presentation

The first presentation spotlighted the Just Futures Initiative, a partnership between People’s Economy Lab, Front and Centered, Statewide Poverty Action Network, and the Economic Justice Alliance. Faduma Fido, People’s Economy Lab, introduced the initiative by naming today’s systemic crises: deepening inequality, institutional distrust, and weakened civic participation. These challenges, she emphasized, are not temporary dysfunctions but symptoms of systems not designed for everyone. Just Futures seeks to reverse this by placing historically excluded communities at the center of policy design and investment decisions. “Those most impacted aren’t just witnesses to policy,” she said. “They are the architects of it.”

The presenters outlined three guiding objectives:

- **Community-led vision:** Defining what equity and justice mean in daily life—from housing to clean air to meaningful work.
- **Accountability:** Making progress visible and tangible so communities can hold government to its promises.
- **Revitalized democracy:** Investing in civic infrastructure so engagement goes beyond the ballot box.

Since 2024, Just Futures has piloted six community assemblies across the state. Funded in part through Climate Commitment Act dollars, these assemblies were convened by trusted community organizations. They allowed residents to *practice* participatory democracy—learning, deliberating, and shaping policy directly. A forthcoming report will detail assembly recommendations, which presenters stressed must be transformed into concrete outcomes.

Lindsay Morgan Tracy, representing Economic Justice Alliance, explained that Just Futures complements Washington’s 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty. She noted that across environmental justice, health, and economic equity, communities and agencies are already aligned by centering lived expertise. The challenge, she said, is “How do we do this together?” Assemblies, she argued, are one promising tool.

Marcy Bowers from the Statewide Poverty Action Network, used a swimming metaphor: you cannot learn to swim by reading instructions, just as you cannot learn participatory democracy without practice. Assemblies provided the opportunity for both communities and government staff to build these skills together. Esther Min with Front and Centered added that examples of “deep democracy” exist globally, and Washington can learn from them to share power more broadly.

Participants echoed these ideas in the chat, underscoring the importance of trust, transparency, and honoring community wisdom. One participant wrote: “*When government shows up but*



*doesn't follow through, it erodes trust faster than silence."* Another noted: *"Assemblies are a chance to make democracy something you do with people, not to people."*

## *Breakout Discussions*

Participants joined small groups to reflect on four guiding questions:

1. How can we build trust and collaboration between community and government?
2. Who currently holds governance power, and who does not?
3. What examples of participatory governance exist locally or globally?
4. What would shared power look like in practice?

## *Themes from Breakouts*

- **Trust and Follow-Through:** Participants repeatedly emphasized that transparency and follow-through are essential.
  - As one chat contributor put it, "Trust isn't built by attending meetings, it's built when actions match commitments."
  - Being in space with community is important. No fixing, no saving, but being there for community.
  - Train and develop community champions who are trusted, and then link them w/ civic orgs, local gov't officials, it's time-consuming but is really trust
- **Decision-Making Power:** Several government participants acknowledged that agencies often solicit feedback but rarely share actual decision-making authority with communities. Some of it is power given through statutory (RCW's), but at the local level community does hold power. Examples Shared:
  - WA DOH's PFAS response, where staff engaged directly with affected communities and followed up consistently.
  - Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) at the local level, and the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) at the state level, as models of participatory governance
  - The Just Futures assemblies themselves, highlighted as promising practice.
- **Expanding Civic Muscle:** Participants agreed that communities must be resourced to lead, bringing both vision and urgency. A chat response captured this well: *"When communities bring lived solutions, it's not consultation—it's leadership."*

## *Resources Shared:*

- Just Futures website: <https://www.justfutureforall.org/>
- Just Futures [Executive Summary on Community Assemblies](#)
- Othering & Belonging Institute: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/>



## Dialogue with Secretary of Health, Dennis Worsham

The meeting turned to the introduction of Secretary of Health Dennis Worsham. Cyril welcomed Dennis warmly, noting his consistent presence in community meetings within his first months in office. Dennis shared his personal journey, beginning in Othello, Wash. and his early work establishing student health programs at Eastern Washington University. He spoke about coming out as a gay man during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, when stigma and lack of access highlighted the intersection of health and justice. His career in public health has since been guided by the belief that lived experience must inform health systems.

He encouraged participants to call him “Dennis,” emphasizing approachability and partnership. He acknowledged that government has historically failed communities but committed to leading in ways that build trust and equity.

### *Community Questions:*

Many Community Collaborative members [contributed to this document](#) through input prior to the meeting. Participants also raised questions in the chat and live discussion, including:

- How DOH can ensure safe vaccine access for undocumented residents without fear of deportation.
- What accountability systems exist to ensure healthcare providers honor equity commitments.
- How DOH will prioritize transparency in decision-making and resource allocation.

Dennis responded by affirming the need for trust-building, follow-through, and centering marginalized voices in shaping health strategy. He noted his intention to continue meeting directly with community partners and to engage with the Community Collaborative as a space for accountability.

One participant captured the spirit of the exchange: *“It matters that Dennis shows up here. It tells us this space isn’t just symbolic—it’s being heard at the highest levels.”* Another wrote: *“Trust takes time, but honesty about limitations is better than silence.”*

### *Resources Shared:*

- West Coast Health Alliance announcement: [link](#)
- Alt National Parks movement: <https://ourparks.org/altnps>
- WA Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN) resources: <https://waisn.org/> and <https://resources.waisn.org/>



## Closing

The meeting closed with gratitude for presenters, participants, and community voices. Cyril reminded attendees that community notes and reflections should be submitted to help strengthen the collective record. The presence of Secretary Worsham was seen as an encouraging step toward more transparent and equitable state-community relationships.

A chat message summed up the spirit of the session: *"This space shows that democracy is strongest when practiced together, across community and government."*

## Closing Quote

"As a nation, we have not yet made good on our foundational commitments to liberty, justice, and equality, or to government of, by, and for the people. But neither have we, the people, failed to achieve them." - Michael McAfee, PolicyLink