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# Enhancing Equity in Cross-Sector Alignment Through Meaningful Community Engagement

## Community Open Mic Sessions Report

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## Funding and Collaboration

*This project is a partnership of the Center for Community Health Alignment at the University of South Carolina, the Alliance for a Healthier SC, the Arnold School of Public Health’s Center for Applied Research and Evaluation, and the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control. This project is funded through Aligning Systems for Health, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*

# Background

Promoting authentic community engagement has proven challenging in the field of public health. To address this significant challenge, the Center for Community Health Alignment in the Arnold School of Public Health was awarded an Aligning Systems for Health grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The goal of the project is to understand how to promote meaningful and intentional community engagement and equitable decision making towards more sustainable community health improvement. The project is being implemented in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, and the Arnold School of Public Health's Center for Applied Research and Evaluation. Led by community health workers (CHW), the project team identified and worked with four SC communities. The communities were selected based on a series of criteria including: the presence of a local CHW, an existing community interest in engaging its members, a backbone organization to partner with, and representation from the health care, social services, and public health sectors. Communities were invited to participate by the project team and final decisions were made collaboratively to ensure the project would be mutually beneficial. Once identified, a series of community listening sessions (aka "open mic"\* community conversation sessions) were conducted to gather community members' perspectives on effective strategies for community engagement, facilitators and barriers of community engagement, and key community challenges.

# Methods

Two iterations of the 'open mic' discussions in each of the four selected communities were conducted (Table 1). The first series was completed in November-December 2021 and the second was completed between December 2021-March 2022. Sessions were held in a diverse range of neighborhoods and individuals from different demographic groups were recruited to ensure a range of perspectives were represented in our data. Some sessions were held virtually due to the resurgence of COVID-19.

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\*In our original research plan, we devised these sessions as 'picnic table' discussions to reflect our intent to have informal community conversations. However, some community partners pointed out the racial connotations to the word, 'picnic'. Thus, we shifted to call these sessions 'open mic community conversations', which was a name inspired by local community partners.

**Table 1. Participating Communities and Open Mic Discussion Sessions**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Community Partner</b>	<b>Open Mic Series 1</b>	<b>Open Mic Series 2</b>
Darlington County	Darlington County Coordinating Council	Hartsville, SC (11/11/21, 12/2/21, 12/8/21)	Darlington, SC (3/3/22*, 3/17/22*, 3/24/22*)
North Columbia (29203 region)	North Columbia Youth Empowerment Initiative	North Columbia, SC (10/27/21, 11/10/21, 11/17/21)	North Columbia, SC (12/16/21, 1/12/22*, 1/19/22*)
Orangeburg County	Tri-County Health Network	Orangeburg, SC (11/15/21, 11/22/21, 12/10/21)	Vance, SC (2/21/22, 2/22/22, 2/28/22)
Spartanburg	Multiple community partners are engaged to reflect a county-wide approach	Spartanburg, SC (12/6/21, 12/13/21, 1/10/21*)	Spartanburg, SC (2/2/22*, 2/8/22*, 2/21/22*)

\*Sessions were held virtually due to COVID-19

## Recruitment

A variety of methods were used to recruit community residents to participate in the open mic discussions, the main one being word of mouth through project staff (Community Health Workers and Technical Advisors) and partnering organizations. The team distributed flyers in-person and invitations via social media. In addition, some participants invited friends to attend the sessions with them or invited them to participate in the next cohort (e.g., a snowball sampling approach).

Each series of the open mic discussions consisted of three sessions per community (for a total of six sessions per community). We requested that individuals participate as a cohort and attend all three sessions of the series, as the conversations were designed to build over time. Participants were provided a \$30 gift card for each session they attended, as well as a meal for in-person sessions.

## Discussion Guide

The first two sessions were dedicated to learning about community engagement perspectives; a discussion guide was developed for each of these sessions. Sessions one and two focused on unique topics, but session two was designed to build upon the previous conversation. Session one focused on learning about the local community, components needed to build trust, and perspectives on community engagement. Session two focused on levels of engagement at the organizational and individual levels, strategies to resolve community challenges, and relationship building. Session three was a member checking session, wherein participants were provided a preliminary summary of sessions 1 and 2 and then asked for any additional feedback. Discussion guides are included in the appendices (Appendix 1). Open mic discussions were conducted both in person and virtually and recorded (with permission). Recordings were transcribed for analysis.

## Participants

A total of 24 sessions were held across the four communities. Sessions ranged in size from 5-14 participants. Demographic forms were completed at in-person sessions, as well as virtual sessions (electronically). Table 2 provides an overview of participant demographics by community. Participants were mostly female (83%) and African American (88%). Participants had a range of education levels and represented a span of generations, as well as current levels of community engagement.

**Table 2. Participant Demographics**

Characteristic	Darlington	Orangeburg	Richland	Spartanburg	Total
<b>Race</b>					
Black or African American	13 (86.7%)	16 (94.1%)	17 (79.3%)	16 (100%)	62 (87.3%)
White	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.9%)	3 (13.0%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.0%)
Other	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (13.0%)	0 (0%)	4 (5.6%)
<b>Hispanic/Latino?</b>					
Yes	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)
No	14 (93.3%)	16 (100%)	22 (100%)	16 (100%)	68 (98.6%)
<b>Education Level</b>					
Some high school	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.8%)
High school diploma or GED	2 (13.3%)	2 (11.8%)	5 (21.7%)	1 (6.3%)	10 (14.1%)
Some college	5 (33.3%)	2 (11.8%)	3 (13.0%)	4 (25.0%)	14 (19.7%)
College degree	5 (33.3%)	7 (41.2%)	12 (52.2%)	8 (50.0%)	32 (45.1%)
Some technical or trade school	0 (0%)	2 (11.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.8%)
Completed technical or trade School	2 (13.3%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (8.7%)	3 (18.8%)	11 (15.5%)
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	2 (13.3%)	4 (23.5%)	5 (21.7%)	1 (6.3%)	12 (16.9%)
Female	13 (86.7%)	13 (76.5%)	18 (78.3%)	15 (93.8%)	59 (83.1%)
<b>Age</b>					
18-24	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.8%)
25-34	6 (40.0%)	2 (11.8%)	6 (26.1%)	4 (25.0%)	18 (25.4%)
35-44	3 (20.0%)	2 (11.8%)	4 (17.4%)	2 (12.5%)	11 (15.5%)
45-54	3 (20.0%)	2 (11.8%)	5 (21.7%)	5 (31.3%)	15 (21.1%)
55-64	1 (6.7%)	3 (17.6%)	6 (26.1%)	4 (25.0%)	14 (19.7%)
65-74	0 (0%)	8 (47.1%)	2 (8.7%)	1 (6.3%)	11 (15.5%)
<b>In your opinion, how involved are you in things like community action groups, community coalitions, and/or nonprofits working in your community?</b>					
Not involved at all	6 (40.0%)	2 (11.8%)	2 (8.7%)	1 (6.3%)	11 (15.5%)
I have some involvement	4 (26.7%)	7 (41.2%)	4 (17.4%)	3 (18.8%)	18 (25.4%)
Fairly involved	2 (13.3%)	3 (17.6%)	4 (17.4%)	2 (12.5%)	11 (15.5%)
Very involved	2 (13.3%)	4 (23.5%)	5 (21.7%)	1 (6.3%)	12 (16.9%)
Have a leadership role	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.9%)	8 (34.8%)	9 (56.3%)	19 (26.8%)

# Key Findings

## People, Not Places, Define Community

When asked how they defined community, **participants focused on relationships and connections rather than places**. For example, an Orangeburg resident explained what shapes their sense of community: *“Community to me is more than the place where I live. My community, for me, over the years has certainly grown from where I live. Because I’m willing to go work here, work there, go in this community, knock on doors or whatever needs to be done. So, my community, it’s just people that I can help.”*

Many participants reflected **a sense of pride in their communities** and felt that it was ‘home’ to them. They shared stories of growing up in these communities, setting down ‘roots’, and having a sense of connection to the people they’ve shared experiences with. For example, a Spartanburg participant explained, *“The people in your neighborhood that you’ve known and they’ve known you...they’re basically like family, it’s my community.”*

Additionally, some people found that their definition of community changed as their lives evolved and/or their needs changed. Some reflected on how their communities have changed as they’ve aged, moved, or changed in their socioeconomic status. One person from Orangeburg explained how their community evolves based on what needs to be done: *“I kind of walk the line between all of those communities. And I had to learn how to sound and seek in each one. So, I feel like I’m from where I can serve. That’s my community.”*

## Communities Have Strong, Resilient Roots and Caring People

Overall, participants felt that **their communities are good places to live**. Specifically, participants reflected that in their communities, people look out for one another, and positive changes are happening. For example, a Columbia resident shared, *“There’s a lot of engagement in 29203...a lot of heart...a lot of love...a lot of togetherness.”* Participants also noted that their communities are made of good people who share common goals. For example, one Darlington resident explained, *“there are a lot of really, really good people here...and a lot of people who just want what’s best for their children no matter which socioeconomic group they’re a member of.”*

The strong, caring spirit of the communities was evident in conversations, as was the desire to move forward and grow thriving communities. A resident from Orangeburg described their community as *“resilient and empathetic.”* Similarly, someone from Spartanburg explained the positive aspects of their community: *“I could say that Spartanburg is really evolving...and is more community oriented and family oriented where it’s trying to provide for the underserved people. You got a lot of stuff going on here.”* Though much of the participants’ conversations focused on community issues, it was clear that participants felt their communities were caring places and they were optimistic about the future.

## Social Issues are a Key Community Concern

While our open mic discussions were led with a series of pointed questions about community engagement, conversations often tracked back to social issues within the community. The following is a summary of issues and concerns of residents across the four communities.

### GUN VIOLENCE IS A PRIMARY COMMUNITY ISSUE

Many participants voiced **concerns over violence** and how it **hinders sense of community and safety**. Some explained that they have been accustomed to violence, drugs, crime, and other destructive behaviors, but *“we don’t have no voice at all.”*

One Richland County resident explained that they came to the open mic discussion specifically to voice their concerns over violence in their community: *“The major problem that I see...is the violence. There’s been a lot of shootouts there [in our apartment parking lot]. Matter of fact, our building just got shot up. I know this probably don’t have anything to do [with this] because I did read over the [recruitment flyer] far as the economic, the food, and the health, and stuff. But this is just a concern that I’m having...and I’m in contact with a lot of people. And it’s like nobody’s caring. There’s been murders out there, and see, this is just a major concern.”*

Darlington County residents shared similar sentiments, discussing recent drive-by shootings and the fear it causes in the community; they remarked, *“There’s just a lot of just anxiety from a lot of people right now...in my own [house], I don’t go outside after dark and that’s scary for me right now.”*

Another resident of Richland County described how a tragic experience of gun violence has driven them to become more involved in the community: *“What makes me want to just eagerly get more involved or try to make this place a safer place, was the little boy...that was in his apartment playing, minding his own business, and a bullet went through the window and shot him. And he went to his mother saying, ‘Mom, I’ve been shot,’ and died in her arms. That happened here, right in [my apartment complex]. So, it just makes me want to do all I can do to be a part of whatever organization, whatever project that just brings the safety for the children, because they’re helpless. This little boy was six years old, so it just really makes me [want to] get involved to make this community a safer place for the children.”*

Participants expressed how there is good happening in their communities, but it is overshadowed by the violence and other disorder that commonly gets reported in the news and media. People commented on how other aspects of **neighborhood disorder including crime, substance abuse, drug dealing, gambling, and gang activity impact their quality of life** too. One resident of Richland County explained how gang activity impacts their community: *“I know that our community is Blood. They marked that territory a few months ago. This is the first time of me living out there for five or six years that I’ve ever seen it to where they’re marking their territory...which raised a red flag*

*because now our kids are exposed to that type of conduct and environment. So, they see that. They are acting upon that. They go back and they take it to schools or bring it into the households.”*

## **LACK OF COMMUNITY PRIDE AND FEELINGS OF HOPELESSNESS**

Participants also commented on the **lack of pride that some residents seem to have for their neighborhood**. Participants talked about how in the past, residents used to sweep their stoops and participate in other community activities. For example, one person shared: *“Every morning I pick up trash in front of our building that is from whatever they do from the weekend up until we open the office up Monday morning. And when I tell you I’ve seen some of the most disgusting things ever in my life in that parking lot, we have cameras. And that is a matter of no respect for yourself or your community. Because it’s not just you, you literally are in an open place doing whatever you think you feel like doing... This is where we live, eat, and breathe. And so how do we get back to that mindset of this is my home?”*

Because of the many social issues in their communities, participants shared that there is a **sense of hopelessness** amongst some residents. Participants explained that the lack of action, development, and growth in their communities can prevent people from getting involved and engaged. When describing violence and crime in their neighborhood, one participant from Richland County explained, *“we don’t have nobody to talk to.”* A **sense of apathy** was also observed across communities by participants. One person from Spartanburg explained, *“Sometimes you been beat down so bad by the system and by people you just like, what’s the use?”* and another from Orangeburg echoed, *“a lot of our citizens, they’re in the situation but they’ve gotten complacent about what’s going on and think nothing’ going to change and that’s how it is.”*

Others talked about the **lack of growth and change in their communities**. One participant described moving away and returning to Richland County only to find, *“everything’s still the same... I don’t see no differences, no changes.”* A participant from Darlington County reiterated similar sentiments, which they largely attributed to elected officials: *“But what really, where’s the change? My grandmother is a native of Darlington. And she said to me... she doesn’t see where it has changed that much. And that’s sad. because after these years... the same thing continues to happen.”*

## **NEED FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY RECREATION PROGRAMS**

The **lack of engagement with teens and young adults** was also described as a barrier in communities. Participants attributed their lack of involvement to *“thinking it’s going to hurt their reputation or it’s going to make them look a certain way”* and people not taking time to reach out to youth. One person from Darlington explained, *“I’d say the younger people are getting left behind... we actually forgot about the youth and now, they are looking to the others who are actually getting them*

*in a lot of trouble.*” Others attributed the lack of involvement among young people to them being busy and trying to start their own lives.

Participants also noted the need to **listen to youth and understand their needs**, which are often discounted. By listening to the thoughts, ideas, and desires of young people, they may become empowered to engage more. One person explained: *“With the teenagers...they are at a stage where they can tell you what they may be interested in, but you have got to listen...you have got to be willing to work with these children. Not go in with the mindset that says, ‘Well, this is what we’re going to do and this is how we’re going to do it.’ But you have got to look at these children these days. It’s not like when we were coming along. You have to keep a hand on them, but you have got to be willing to listen and do some of the things that they are talking about...to keep them involved. Let them feel that they are a part of it.”*

Participants discussed the **need for programs and support to guide youth in their communities**, as they can get involved in gangs and other bad influences if they do not have activities and mentoring in the community. Many explained how parents are often busy working and need community support to help supervise children and focus their energy into positive outlets. Many families lack these resources and participants from across the state emphasized the need for free and low cost outlets for youth. One participant from Richland explained, *“And in my [apartment] building...those children migrate from the bottom to the top of that apartment complex because they’re just looking for something to do, looking for something to get involved in. It’s nothing for them to do. So, it’s like, ‘Okay, what can we do as a community to bring community engagement into [our community] to show these children that, ‘Hey, we have your back. Hey, we’re here. What do you need?’ Because parents be doing their own thing. So, if there’s no community engagement out there for the youth, their outlet is going to be drugs, alcohol, gang violence and dropouts in school and things like that, whatever. So, the youth is more important to me out there in [our community] more than anything.”*

However, playing sports and getting involved in other activities often costs money and requires someone to transport the children. One participant from Darlington explained how the lack of transportation limits recreational opportunities in their community: *“That is even a challenge for the students in Society Hill because we don’t have a recreation [center]. They have to ride the bus to Darlington...ride it back home. Often time the parents are working and they can’t pick the children up when they want to do extracurricular activities, such as sports. So that’s a big handicap for a lot of our students here that we don’t have access to those things and the traveling that has to occur, and the parents that can’t be available to take them to practice and pick them up from practice.”*

## LACK OF BASIC NECESSITIES, INCLUDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS FRUSTRATES RESIDENTS

**Lack of affordable housing, economic development, and lack of other key resources (including education, childcare, transportation, and jobs)** were also significant concerns for open mic participants. Residents across communities discussed the general lack of development in certain neighborhoods, as well as development that has displaced residents due to high costs or broken promises (e.g., promising local economic improvement or employment that never materializes).

Participants explained the complexities of housing and how issues including **gentrification, unfair housing subsidy stipulations, and general lack of affordability** impact people's everyday lives. People from Spartanburg discussed how local economic development including hotels and the BMW car plant came in and drove up surrounding rent prices. One person explained how this made housing unaffordable: *"The rent went from like \$700 to \$1,200 a month for the same house. So, if you're not in a job that's making at least 16, 17 [dollars an hour] ...it's no longer one third of your income...a lot of times now...it is over half your income."* Another Spartanburg resident shared their frustration over gentrification that has happened in their community: *"I think gentrification was the one of the worst things that has ever happened to us. They call it revitalization, but it's not. When you are taking from people that work hard every day and you are trying to mask it as revitalization, that is an ugly thing... On the north side of Spartanburg, they revitalized a whole lot, but when you take home ownership from people, that is not a good thing. So, you're moving the people out and come in and revitalize it and it looks so different and it's beautiful, y'all, but where's the home ownership? The apartments and the buildings. Somebody owns those buildings and they're collecting...So we got to really, really, really think, what do we need to do? Revitalization is one thing, but gentrification is something totally different."*

**Transportation services are lacking, especially for youth and senior citizens** and as a Darlington resident shared, *"they're just scattered all over the place."* Participants from Orangeburg also discussed the lack of transportation for seniors: *"Our community has a lot of older seniors that are not able to drive and without public transportation or a family member, they're stuck. They're not able to do the things that they need to do and that's a major issue. It's harder now because they're getting older and now, I'm waiting for someone to bring stuff to them or see what they need... It's getting really bad with that."*

Two communities in particular, Darlington and Orangeburg, have very rural areas. Residents from those counties spoke about how **geographic isolation in rural communities result in lack of access to resources including jobs, education, childcare, quality grocery stores, and healthcare**. For example, Orangeburg County residents explained their concern over the distance they have to travel to their local hospital, which is 30-35 minutes, as well as concern over plans to consolidate local schools into one 'central' location. The **lack of jobs and development in rural areas** was also noted as a particular concern. For example, participants expressed perceptions that

more development occurs around highways to serve outsiders rather than around residential areas where services are needed. Often, people live in smaller towns because it is more affordable, but travel elsewhere to work.

In addition, participants shared how the **lack of resources in their small towns impacts their ability to keep young residents**. For example, Orangeburg residents explained how the lack of economic and infrastructure development in small towns results in young people leaving the community: *“One of the challenges that we have is being a community that historically was a farming community, but that’s changing. It left us in a place where we didn’t get the infrastructure within the community and where industry...they wouldn’t come because it wouldn’t benefit them. That hurt us because our young people, they don’t have the same opportunities other communities have. They go to Atlanta, Greenville...they go to other places where there’s more work.”*

While conversation about the lack of access to healthy food was particularly pronounced in the more rural counties, it was a concern discussed across the board. One participant described how they tried to get seniors in a rural area of Orangeburg (Vance, SC) meal delivery: *“I have a gentleman that I help take care of and I called Meal on Wheels, but they don’t serve hot meals...only frozen stuff and that frozen stuff...I will not feed it to anybody...it’s not good, it’s not healthy. And that’s something seniors need...more fresh stuff, but they could not give them even one hot meal a week. So that’s one of the problems, and we have a lot of seniors that really could use a hot meal a day.... [it’s because of] ...lack of money that’s being delegated to the communities.”*

## Barriers to Community Engagement

Participants shared several important insights on barriers to community engagement. Their perspectives are highlighted below.

## HISTORY OF RACISM SETS AN IMPORTANT CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**The impact of structural racism and inequities in opportunity** were mentioned, as they underlie many of the social issues community residents are experiencing. Two communities shared specific examples of **traumatic events in their local history rooted in racism**: the Orangeburg Massacre<sup>†</sup> and the Lamar School Bus Riots<sup>‡</sup>. These events continue to shape the perspectives of residents and their feelings of mistrust and being ignored. One resident of Darlington shared about recent healing

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<sup>†</sup> In February 1968, police opened fire on a large group of unarmed black students during a civil rights protest at South Carolina State University. The incident resulted in the death of 3 young men and injuries in 28 more. While largely unrecognized, it was one of the most violent events of the Civil Rights Movement. Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/1960s/orangeburg-massacre>

<sup>‡</sup> On March 3, 1970, a large group of angry white parents attacked two school buses carrying black students to Lamar Elementary and High schools in Darlington County. Source: <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/lamar-riots/>

over the Lamar Bus Riots: *“That’s the elephant in the room that nobody likes to deal with. In 2020, the town of Lamar made a decision...to recognize the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lamar Bus Riots. That was a very gut wrenching thing. There was so much misinformation, missing information...We spoke to some of the people that were actually on the bus and went through it...they was kids then of course, they grown people now. So, there could be healing for the community, there could be peace. [When] we interviewed them, it took them back to when they was small kids on that bus and some of them you can tell they still had...pain that they had way back then. And they said ... nobody never talked about it...they downplayed, stuck it under the rug... We knew it would be painful for people that actually went through it...and even some of the [victim’s] parents because...they told their kids to be quiet because they were staying on people’s property and land. They didn’t want to lose their jobs or get thrown off. But, after it was over, because some people didn’t know, or they forgotten about it. It opened a lot of people’s eyes. So now I tell you about how we are getting better. Like an alcoholic, you got to admit...until you admit it, you can’t solve the problem. You can’t move forward. So that was a great stepping stone for us. We still got some issues...but it’s a lot better than it was.”*

Another Darlington resident shared their perspectives on the racism their peers continue to face and how it shapes their engagement: *“My grandmother [and I], we have conversations about things that she’s experienced in her life. Things that I couldn’t imagine going through, but it’s happening. People my age and I see it all the time, and as an African American male, I’m scared if I go outside...I’m glad that I’m the lucky few...if I get pulled over for a busted taillight or something like that, I’ve had very pleasant cops. But not everybody is that lucky.”*

## **“IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE WHO YOUR COMMUNITY IS”: HISTORY OF BLACK COMMUNITIES BEING IGNORED AND HAVING DISPARATE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND INFORMATION**

Participants expressed that **information to access and navigate resources and events is kept from certain populations**, including people of color. There is a need to diversify methods and modes of communication to the community to ensure that the information is reaching individuals at large and particularly those who need it most. A participant from Spartanburg shared: *“We have a huge issue with trust and leadership in our community. I know that there are resources there, but the disconnect in the community is that everybody doesn’t know where these resources are or they don’t know how to communicate. And then when you go to ask for whatever resources, instead of being assisted in the process of identifying how you can get help, it is kind of discouraging or belittling to people that do not really know what exactly they need to ask. Customer service is a huge thing that we need to work on in every department around here because you don’t always get people that have very open, responsive ways to meet people where they are.”* In addition, **local businesses** are not supported in the same way as businesses started by outsiders.

## **“WE’VE SEEN THIS BEFORE”: LACK OF TRUST IN DECISION MAKERS, STEMMING FROM A HISTORY OF DISINGENUOUS ENGAGEMENT AND BROKEN PROMISES**

As previously described, **the lack of trust** in communities emerged as a key barrier. Many shared stories of **broken promises from local policymakers, developers, and other decision makers**, which has resulted in an overwhelming **lack of trust in elected officials and other decision makers** across communities. Participants explained that politicians come into their communities to campaign, making promises to get votes, but are never seen again once elected. One person from Richland County explained the lack of interest to their community: *"[they] want us to come out and vote or come to their meetings and things like that. It's like once they're where they need to be they disappear. And the thing is they'll come out, they'll shake your hand. 'You need anything? I got somebody in my building, I got somebody in my office that works with that.' You reach out and get their email addresses and email them and they don't even contact you back. They don't even contact you back."* There is a general sense that elected officials do not care about participants' neighborhoods because they do not experience the predicaments that many residents encounter on a regular basis.

Others shared those **efforts to engage the community thus far have been selective, at the convenience of outsiders**. Moreover, these selective engagement opportunities are seen as **inauthentic or disingenuous**; for example, to create a photo opportunity or to raise a politician's profile. Participants described it as *"doing the least amount to look good."* A Richland County participant explained, *"It seems like around the time it's time to vote for people, you see all these people in the communities, taking pictures and all these things, and then once you've been elected...you don't see these people. It's like where y'all gone? Because I live in a community that that has happened. And it's like, 'What have you done for the community?' So, then when the smoke is clear...you don't see these politicians out here advocating for these communities at all."*

There was also discussion regarding the **need for change in elected officials** and especially the **need for younger people to step up and get involved in elected positions**. In particular, people discussed the need for young people "to step up" and run for elected office because most elected officials in local government do not represent younger generations. For example, a Richland County participant explained: *"A lot of times there are too many folks that have been champions, they've been holding the torch for their communities for so long. And those people need to be, they need to be supplements to these individuals. There need to be folks that are groomed to support and to learn how these individuals do what they do so that you can add to the number of what they're doing and not just always rely on that it's always going to be, so and so. Who's going to speak up? It's always going to be this person or this place or usually this individual that's going to do something or say something. So, creating the resources that others supplement the efforts instead of just expecting that it's going to be the same individuals and the same initiatives. So, use the relationships and the collaborations that have been working?"* However, others explained the **need to build up, train, and**

**mentor a new generation of community leaders** to prepare the next generation to follow in the footsteps of local leaders.

## LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY VOICES IN DECISION MAKING

Participants also shared frustration with **outsiders coming into neighborhoods and making decisions without community input**. To some, there have been no opportunities to be part of decision making, which has resulted in people feeling disenfranchised. One person from Darlington explained, *"It seems to play out where somebody tell you, 'This is what we going to do. Whether you like it, don't like it.' A lot of time people just come, especially you talking about people with clout and power. Sometimes they'll pacify you and listen. Or pretend they're listening, but they already have their mind made up."*

A Spartanburg resident explained the **need to ask community residents for their perspectives in a respectful and dignifying way**: *"When we went through urban renewal, the people who are sitting at the table, should actually be from the community. It shouldn't be, we're going to tell you what we're going to do. It should be, you tell us, or let's sit down and have a conversation to see what's needed... you have to meet people where they are... and it might not necessarily be that professional setting. And we sit down and listen and not just discredit them because they're not as articulate or hadn't been to school for 30 years. If they have something to say, you should listen, not brush them off as they're not educated."*

For example, participants in Orangeburg reported being left out of decisions on what schools will remain open or be consolidated or what incentives businesses will receive for moving into an area. An Orangeburg resident shared their displeasure with a new plan to consolidate local schools: *"what they intend to do on this side of the county is shut all our schools down that's within the small towns and want to put everything on one campus. We're too big of an area for that to happen."* Others voiced their frustration over a pattern of liquor stores, payday loan companies, and other negative businesses preying on poor communities and local government showing no support for Black owned businesses.

Others discussed how **outside people or organizations come in and deploy events and programming that do not match community needs**. One person explained how this plays out and results in apathy and frustration: *"We get tired of doing stuff because somebody else from the outside has an idea, but then we go and then the community doesn't show up and then everybody say, 'Well, the community didn't show up.' Well, that's because that's not what the community really wanted. So, I think it's kind of just getting to know and meet people. And I think sometimes we depend so much on what used to be done, but this also is like a whole different generation of people where some things are just not what people necessarily care about. So just finding out what do the people want to build a relationship."*

## DIVISION BETWEEN NEIGHBORHOODS AND A GENERAL LACK OF UNITY

Participants also explained that there is **division between neighborhoods and a general lack of unity and trust** in some local communities. Someone from Orangeburg explained, *“There’s no trust. The people in Vance don’t trust people in Santee. The people in Santee don’t trust the people in Edisto. People in Edisto don’t trust the people in Orangeburg. There isn’t even trust in our own neighborhood.”*

Participants explained that it can be more common to “bicker”, criticize, and blame than have discussions to bring the community together. Others explained the need for relationships and connections between neighbors and how that can lead to becoming more engaged. A Darlington County resident explained how residents have been divided by recent violence: *“It’s just very sad, because I’ve always felt very safe in this town up until recently. And now I’m just so sick of everybody pointing fingers. It’s this one. It’s that one. It’s this person’s fault, that person’s fault. And I’m like until we just get it together, nothing’s going to straighten out around here.”*

Participants also described frustration over people “getting rich” and moving out of the community. They explained that this drives communities apart, rather than bringing them together. Others noted *“segregation within our own community...you move to [that neighborhood], you forget some of the people that live there now probably grew up in St. Paul ...so sometimes people forget...where they come from.”*

A Spartanburg resident shared their perspective on the **need for unity and collective action**: *“It if we are one Spartanburg, we need to be the entire one Spartanburg. Highland don’t just need to be Highland. Southside don’t need to be Southside. Northside don’t need to just be Northside. I’m kind of here to support the importance of us working together as one...and remembering that everybody has a voice at the table and to listen to them and fight for them and hear what they have to say. It should all be one...a house divided will not stand.”*

Some noted that **certain areas or neighborhoods receive resources, information, and attention, while others are left behind**. One participant from Darlington explained how they often do not get information about events: *“I remember talking to the city manager and she’s like, ‘So, why don’t your community, the Black community come out to the things downtown?’ And we’re like, ‘You all don’t advertise for us.’ And they don’t. They mainly advertise to the people that they want to come...so, when they have stuff downtown, you don’t see many Black people. I went out there the other week. I forgot what was happening, and it was like me and one other Black guy.”* Participants also called out several **groups within the community that are often ignored and/or left out**. Those included individuals with mental health conditions, senior citizens, and the homeless.

## LACK OF TIME AND ENERGY FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The **lack of time and energy for community engagement** was also discussed. Participants explained that many people are “*just trying to survive*” and that many residents are working multiple jobs, raising children, and/or caring for older family members. A Richland County resident explained how their commitment to family limits the extent to which they can be involved: “*I am a server here. I have two younger children. They have an older sibling that still lives with us. He has a son, my grand baby. And also, the mother lives with us because she can't, when she got pregnant from my son, her mother put her out. So, she became homeless. I became an advocate for her. I can't let you live on the streets. Even though I was putting myself in jeopardy of losing my stability in my living situation. But I took her, living there, just adding her to the lease, giving her a place to stay. I'm less involved in my community because I have so much going on in my home. Whatever time I get, I try to dedicate to the community or to another situation outside of my home. That's why I'm pretty much less involved. But I try to stay engaged.*” Others may be facing other obstacles. One participant from Spartanburg explained, “*the ones that are struggling so hard, they don't think they can even imagine doing something for somebody else or understand that it's not necessary monetarily, that you can give us your time or your expertise.*”

## LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO ENGAGE AND CONNECT WITH EXISTING EFFORTS

Participants discussed challenges in connecting to resources from two different perspectives. First, they explained that people in need do not know how to access existing supports, resources, and programming. In addition, people shared the need to create linkages between existing community-based efforts to enhance collective impact.

Several conversations highlighted that **people need help connecting with and navigating to available services**. This stems from a lack of awareness that resources exist, as well as people not knowing how to access available resources or navigate the process. Some participants knew of resources that others did not, so the open mic discussions were facilitative for individuals to make connections. This illustrated the challenges that many residents have in finding and connecting to available resources.

People talked about the need to walk alongside people to resources and establish ‘warm handoffs’ to ensure people really make the connection to what they need, rather than just directing people to things. One person shared how people need help making connections to resources: “*A lot of people qualify for the COVID relief from county, but you go to a keyboard and you got a missing document. You can't hit submit. Everybody just don't have it in them to engage the resources and see the process through. And to me, that's what the doorkeeper is. Not to do it for you, but just to walk with you. Everybody don't have like that person that they can anchor to. To me, at least for a season, you might have to link up with somebody until you find your own voice.*”

A Richland County resident shared, *“There are so many resources available and people that want it and are in need of it. But there’s a huge disconnection between the two.”* Participants talked about the need for more marketing and awareness raising activities including sharing information on local television stations and other media outlets to help people learn about programs that can help. One participant described a lack of motivation some people may have to access resources, which could stem from prior negative experiences or uncertainty on how to gain access to services. They explained, *“There is a disconnect between people looking to help and the ones that need help... When we first moved here ...I was trying to find things, but I didn’t really know where to go and who to talk to. So, I just opened my mouth...just started asking around, going places and I found that’s another thing people won’t do. It goes back to, they are lazy. You want resources? You need things? You got to get out here. You have to seek these things out.”*

However, some noted that there is a **disconnect between what the community needs and available services** and resources. Some attributed the disconnect to a lack of effective communication and the need to share information with people on their terms and *“in a way that speaks to them.”* One person from Orangeburg explained how this stems from a lack of attention to community needs: *“What tends to happen is I’m going take this one tiny thing over here. And if I don’t have to expend too much energy, but I’m going to help these poor people over here...because I want to feel good ... I’m not sure it’s ever communicating what we need as a community because we are so separate.”*

There was also significant conversation around the **challenges of working in silos, duplication of efforts, lack of communication among community members, and lack of connectivity.** Participants talked about how working in silos promotes the lack of unity in their communities and how it inhibits collective action. They explained that people often get inspired to work on a local problem, but often work on their own and do not seek out others doing similar work.

Others emphasized the **need to increase awareness of community grassroots work to work together and reduce duplication.** In addition, people talked about the need to connect those individuals and start conversations about how to take action together. One person from Richland explained the need to collaborate, which can enhance efficiency and community impact: *“At a minimum, we should have awareness of each other, so that we don’t duplicate the efforts...in the ideal world, it would be great if we all could just work together. But some people got to work in their lane, but I think, yeah, if I have awareness of it and that’s not my direct service or thing, I still try to do my best homework. At least know the who’s who, and make sure that whatever our service is, that people are getting it.”*

## **“Outreach Is Only a Position”:** Lack of Trust in Public Sectors

Discussion about public sector agencies (e.g., state and county public health and social service offices, hospitals, and health systems) focused on **lack of communication and lack of willingness to change to improve services for communities.** Participants explained a history of negative

experiences, community needs not being met, and lack of engagement and communication. Others emphasized that the priorities of public sector agencies are just driven by politics. These issues have resulted in a strong lack of trust for these agencies in many communities.

When asked about the role of large institutions within their community, participants were critical of their lack of regard for community engagement and input. People also talked about lack of trust in organizations, hospitals, and state agencies, noting that **they make decisions without the community's best interest**. They expressed that these **organizations and institutions do not represent community voices and perspectives** and do not make decisions with the community in mind. They do not trust these institutions, which can in part be attributed to prior history. One participant from Richland County shared their perspective on public organizations and agencies: *“they do not communicate with each other. They do not take the time to expose people outside their [organization] to what they are doing. They have had a very selfish mindset, ‘This is what we do’...No, this is what you supposed to do for the community. And work with other organizations who might be doing the same. So, you can unite to save money, the most important--inform. They do not take the time to communicate with video, TV, newsprint...to give public information.”*

## What Is Needed to Meaningfully Engage with Communities?

Participants shared their perspectives on ‘what works’ for true community engagement. Among their suggestions were to **meet people where they are with solutions to their community concerns**. People emphasized that learning a community takes time. Residents from Darlington County emphasized **the importance of making “everybody feel like a stakeholder”** and valuing everyone's thoughts and perspectives. The importance of grassroots-led community work was also heavily discussed, as was how some community work goes unnoticed when people do it with a low profile. Similarly, people also expressed that low profile work is more authentic because it means that individuals involved are not seeking personal benefits (such as praise or a boost to their reputation).

*“Authentic, meaningful engagement means you're real. You care about those people. When churches give to people or they give to organizations, they don't publish a list and saying a list saying, ‘This is what we did and where we did it and why we did it. Look at us and see what we're doing.’ It's because it's done from the heart...You do it because it needs to be done...and that's important because if we don't, then we can't grow as a community.”*

## TRUST IS THE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The importance of trust and relationship building was one of the most common conversations across all communities. Participants discussed the importance of building trust within the community.

**Building trust takes making genuine connections, taking the time to listen, and seeing things from someone else's perspective.** It also takes acknowledging the past, history, and how the community may have been mistreated. People explained **that listening to the community and asking for feedback** can help identify community assets to build upon. A Richland County resident shared their pride over recent community development spurred by people coming together: *"I can say, my community is better than when I moved there about five or six years ago due to leadership in the community, people coming together through an outreach church that came and saw the needs of my community. And by me giving my ideas and input and engaging with other community leaders, our community has become better. The key...it's that the people that live in that community need to find a way to come together, talk to one another, get to know your neighbor because that's the most important step. All it takes is effort."*

Participants discussed their value for honesty and efforts to make genuine connections. A participant from Darlington County explained how making one on one connections helps: *"I like what [the other participant] said earlier about going to the actual houses, knocking on the door, building a relationship with them. And, I mean, even if you do have an event, going to the houses and building a relationship and inviting them personally to go the event. And making sure that it's something that they would be interested in and advertising it in a way that they would be able to see it."*

Another person from Richland County echoed similar sentiments: *"Well, what I have seen since I been here, a lot of organizations have come out. But I had noticed...some of them were lazy. They will come and they'd be just standing there. They'd be talking to the people that they came with. It was a great thing...they were feeding, and clothing, and serving the people, but a little bit more could've took place. Everybody that's in that organization, they were pretty much just engaging with one another. So, you have to branch out your comfort zone...branch out when you go in communities and start talking to somebody new that you don't know. Because that's the only way that you're going to get people engaged, by going up to them, talk to them, visiting them, and different things. And I didn't see much of that out the organizations that came here, they basically just talked amongst one another. Some of them did, but the majority of them didn't, they didn't take time and say, 'Hey. How are you doing? How's life been treatment you?' or 'What's going on?' They didn't engage in that, so you can't expect for the people in the community to engage."*

Participants agreed that trusted individuals are usually people from within the community and **trust is built through consistency, commitment, honesty, and follow through.** Residents want people who come into their community to have a reliable presence and establish long-term connections. One person from Richland County explained, *"I think it's more about follow through. When we come together and we brainstorm, when the idea has a fire for a little while and then drops off. And to me, that's where the distrust is. It's like, well you know everybody parachutes in with their program, they*

*"I think it's more about follow through. When we come together and we brainstorm, when the idea has a fire for a little while and then drops off. And to me, that's where the distrust is. It's like, well you know everybody parachutes in with their program, they*

*say they're going to do X, Y, and Z, and then they might stay for a little while and then you don't see them no more. So, it's showing up to sustain. I think it's better to do something small and sustain it than one big to do and not do it anymore."*

Participants expressed trust happens when people listen to the community and work with them to get them what they need and address problems important to them. The value of **being open-minded, humble, and open to other people's ideas** was also emphasized. A participant from the open mic discussion in Richland County explained their perspective on how to build trust: *"We are just a couple of white guys, but the community wanted us there because we took the time before we ever started any initiative or tried to do any sort of change. We just spent the time trying to build relationships with the people, because it's not our neighborhood, it's theirs. And so, I think that that trust factor comes through relationship and authenticity and showing again that you're there to help empower them, and give them the resources that they need. Not just to be the answer and walk away, because that's where people are most frustrated and most hurt in our communities is that people walk away too much."*

## **IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION TO LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE COMMUNITY**

**The importance of different communication strategies and getting the word out about community events and efforts was discussed across communities.** Multiple communication strategies are needed to reach community residents including in-person promotion in neighborhoods. One participant from Darlington explained the need to take information to community members in natural meeting places: *"We got to go to the barber and beauty shops. We just can't rely on Facebook and Instagram and those other things, which is what seems to be what's popular now with communication. I think we've got to look at different ways of communicating so that the people that need the message can actually get the message."*

The **timing and location of outreach activities** was also discussed. Participants explained that people may want to participate in an event, but their enthusiasm may *"slide by the wayside"* because it occurs at a time that doesn't work for their schedule. Others suggested **working through trusted organizations** including churches, as they are often a gathering place. Additional trusted organizations mentioned included schools (including principals and teachers), food banks, fraternities/sororities, and organizations with community health workers. Neighborhood associations were also mentioned several times as a key strategy for community engagement. One person from Spartanburg County explained the value of neighborhood associations in creating connections: *"Our neighborhood...we are undergoing a huge change right now. So, being a part of the neighborhood association and having your voice heard, or being able to speak to elected officials gives you the opportunity to say, 'Hey at least I know that my opinion is being taken seriously and taken into account of these major things happening around us.' So, instead of it happening to you, you're a part of it. And it be not just brushed to the side, as in 'Oh, that's just so and so, so and so always got something to say' ...Because this is where I work, where I reside, where I raise my children, where I live, where I play, where I invest my tax dollars. You know? So, all of that takes your voice being*

*heard the same way as [name] or whomever.”* These groups and people are trusted because of their “sweat equity” and their history of working alongside the community to address their issues and providing relevant resources and solutions.

A school bus driver from Spartanburg explained how they’ve taken it upon themselves to help families make connections as a trusted community member: *“If I get some information, I’ll pass it along. But that’s how I get the one with parents. So, by taking the time, just cause I’m a bus driver don’t mean I have it and I’m going use it. I’m just like you, is that I just drive a bus. You know what I mean? So that’s one reason why I want to do this so I can reach out to the community, let them know it’s okay to use these resources. Let them know, at some point, we have to get together as a community and stop not using these resources and not want to use them just because and use it and let that be a stepladder. Use. Let that be a step ladder to do better. Not worrying about what people say.”*

## Conclusions

Participants across all four communities discussed concerns about social issues in their community, including gun violence, crime, lack of unity, and lack of resources. In addition, a host of barriers to community engagement were identified, including a history of traumatic events rooted in racism, lack of trust in decision makers, lack of opportunities for community voices in local decision making, residents feeling ignored, or not having access to resources and information. Discussion also focused on how lack of action, growth, and change in their communities can hinder people’s motivation to engage. Lack of time to participate in community events also impedes engagement, as people are busy working multiple jobs and caring for children and elderly family members. Lastly, participants explained that some people do not know how to engage with community efforts and that the lack of connection between existing efforts makes it difficult to know where to join in. Discussion about public sectors focused on the lack of communication and lack of willingness to change to meet the needs of communities. Negative experiences and lack of communication from these agencies and organizations has resulted in a strong lack of trust.

Participants emphasized that trust is essential to building authentic and meaningful community engagement. Building trust requires that people working in communities take the time to listen to residents’ concerns and identify their strengths, but also acknowledge past traumas and wrongdoings of the past. Moreover, it takes time to establish relationships and make genuine interpersonal connections that are centered on treating individuals with respect and dignity and having honest conversations, even though they can be difficult. Consistency, follow through, and dependability are critical to establishing trusting relationships as well. Implementation of these community generated solutions to promote community engagement will enhance the ability of public health practitioners to make lasting partnerships for collective impact.

# Appendix 1: Open Mic Discussion Guides

## SESSION ONE

Introduction: I am [NAME OF FACILITATOR] and I will be your facilitator for today's conversation. [**Facilitator:** If someone is assisting you, please introduce that person or have the person to introduce him/herself]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this series of Open Mic Community Conversations for the Exploring Meaningful Community Engagement project. Our goal is to understand how to best engage with community residents with respect to health improvement and community initiatives. We know that change is more lasting and impactful in a community when people who live and work in that community are engaged in the efforts. This project is to specifically learn about meaningful community engagement and better understand how to best facilitate engaging community residents in the process - what works, what doesn't, and what can be improved. The goal of this project is not to solve any problems that may be identified but more about the process for engaging community residents in these efforts. We will share a summary of findings with interested/key stakeholders.

This project is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and is being conducted by the Center for Community Health Alignment (CCHA) in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier SC, SC DHEC, CARE (Core for Applied Research and Evaluation), and [NAME OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION].

## LOGISTICS

**Facilitator:** Be sure to cover location of restrooms, plan for refreshments, and any other logistics.

## IN-PERSON

We are hoping to have a lively discussion that is estimated to last for approximately 60-90 mins and want to lay some ground rules for these conversations.

- While we would like everyone to participate fully, if there is a question that you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not have to answer.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to leave at any time. Your participation in this discussion will not affect any benefits or services that you currently receive.
- If you have an emergency and need to use your phone, we ask that you step out quietly so that there is not a disruption to others in the session.
- In addition, please remember that what is said during this meeting is confidential, and we ask you not to discuss it with others outside this meeting. Any summaries we produce, will not include names, and we will not reveal your identities to others. We encourage you to be open and honest during these meetings.

## VIRTUAL

We are hoping to have a lively discussion that is estimated to last for approximately 60-90 mins and want to lay some ground rules for these conversations.

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- Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to leave at any time. Your participation in this discussion will not affect any benefits or services that you currently receive.

- Please try to have your cameras on and microphones unmuted when you are ready to speak. Please remain on mute if you are not speaking. Thank you!
- In addition, please remember that what is said during this meeting is confidential, and we ask you not to discuss it with others outside this meeting. Any summaries we produce, will not include names, and we will not reveal your identities to others. We encourage you to be open and honest during these meetings.

You will be given a \$30 gift card for each time you participate in an open mic community conversation. Gift cards will be given at the end of each session. As a reminder, we would like you to commit to participate in the 3 related discussions, because we want to make sure we have the time to explore this topic in depth. The first discussion being this general discussion, the second will be a more in-depth discussion (deeper dive) and finally a feedback session to confirm what we gathered from the first two discussions. The information that you will provide is very important to us and we want to make sure we capture everything. We would like to record these sessions to assist with the notes. Do you all feel comfortable with us recording the session? **[Facilitator:** Ask participants to raise their hand or give a thumbs up to indicate that they are okay with being recorded.]

**If yes.** Be sure to hit record on your recording device.

**If no.** Okay, I understand. We will do our best to take notes by hand. Be sure to let us know if you would like anything to be off record.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Let's get started, we will begin with an icebreaker.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** What is the best piece of advice that you have ever received?

Okay. Thank you all for taking part in that activity. Now we will begin our conversation.

- 1) This project is all about communities, and who helps decide the direction of the community. First, can you all tell me a little about this community?
  - a. How would you define your community? Or What do you consider your community?
  - b. What are some good things about living here?
  - c. What are some challenges that the community faces?
    - i. What do you think contributes to these challenges?
- 2) We have heard from others that issues of equity (meaning some communities have access to fewer resources, and opportunities) contribute to challenges that communities face. What do you think about this statement/claim?
- 3) Can you tell me about the individuals or organizations working on community issues or challenges?
  - a. What kinds of challenges are they working on?
    - i. What do you know about why they have chosen to work on these issues, specifically?
    - ii. How well to these issues reflect concerns among community members?

If you are *in-person* for this discussion, you can just go around the room for the icebreaker.

If you are *virtual*, call on people one-by-one, so you make sure everyone has an opportunity to respond.

In both cases, you as the facilitator should go first to provide an example

- 4) Who are some of the community leaders, community champions, and/or organizations that have a lot of trust within your community?
  - a. What was essential (needed) in building that trust?
- 5) Next, I want you to think about this term “community engagement”. What do you think authentic or meaningful community engagement looks like?
  - a. To what extent, do you feel that this happens in your community?
- 6) We conducted some interviews with community leaders and heard this, [INSERT De-identified QUOTE HERE]. What are your thoughts about this?
- 7) That wraps up the things that we wanted to talk about, is there anything else you’d like for us to know that we haven’t talked about today?
- 8) Do you have any questions for us?

### **CALL TO ACTION**

As we wrap up Session one, we would like to thank you for your time today and ask that you think about this discussion we had today. At the next session, we will dig a little deeper and talk more in-depth about challenges, engagement (who’s engaged, barriers to engagement, what would it take to get more community residents engaged) and building trust. We ask that you also think about ways that you may want to get involved within your community. This could be engaging in a conversation with your neighbor, friend, and/or a family member about community engagement and thinking through how to become more active in community endeavors if you desire to do so.

From the pre-survey that you completed, we saw that some of you were interested in being involved in your community. Are there any areas that we missed? If so, please let us know.

Our team will review the information that was heard here today to ensure that we have a clear picture of what was communicated, in doing that we will determine if any clarifying questions are needed and prepare for the next session.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS FORM REMINDER**

If you have not done so, please complete the demographics form and be sure to submit it before leaving today. Thank you.

### **DATE OF NEXT SESSION**

[Facilitator: Discuss potential next date for session two with the group. Try to confirm or pinpoint a date before leaving the session.]

Let’s look at our calendars to schedule a time in the next two weeks for the next session. [Facilitators: Please distribute gift cards to each participant.]

Thank you again for your time!

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## **SESSION TWO**

Introduction: Thanks for coming back for this second Open Mic Community Conversation. Again, I am [NAME OF FACILITATOR] and I will be facilitating this session. **[Facilitator:** If someone is assisting you, please introduce that person or have the person to introduce him/herself]. In this meeting, we will talk more about community engagement, and how people in the community participate in working on some of the challenges that we talked about last time. For this discussion we want to focus on community residents who don't work for the organizations we talked about last time, but live here, and maybe have been affected by the issues that we have been talking about.

## **LOGISTICS**

**Facilitator:** Be sure to cover location of restrooms, plan for refreshments, and any other logistics.

## **IN-PERSON**

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## **VIRTUAL**

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- In addition, please remember that what is said during this meeting is confidential, and we ask you not to discuss it with others outside this meeting. Any summaries we produce, will not include names, and we will not reveal your identities to others. We encourage you to be open and honest during these meetings.

You will be given a \$30 gift card for each time you participate in an open mic community conversation. Gift cards will be given at the end of this session.

The information that you will provide is very important to us and we want to make sure we capture everything. To help us with the report/summaries, we would like to record these sessions to assist with the notes. We would like to record these sessions to assist with the notes. Do you all feel comfortable with us recording the session? **[Facilitator:** Ask

participants to raise their hand or give a thumbs up to indicate that they are okay with being recorded.]

**If yes.** Be sure to hit record on your recording device.

**If no.** Okay, I understand. We will do our best to take notes by hand. Be sure to let us know if you would like anything to be off record.

Let's get started, we will begin with an icebreaker for today.

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** Would you rather have more time or more money & why?

Thank you all for taking part in the icebreaker. Now let's continue the conversation.

- 9) To start off, thinking back on the challenges, if you had an issue or concern about something going on in the community. Where would you go, or who would you talk to about it?
  - a. What would make you want to be more involved in dealing with these issues?
- 10) Thinking about your community's challenges, how well have local organizations done in getting community members engaged in addressing them?
  - a. From your perspective, how are community members involved in making decisions about how community issues are addressed?
    - i. Are there any community members who serve in leadership roles in these efforts?
    - ii. Can you tell me more about how those folks serve in leadership roles?
- 11) Now let's think about the larger sectors of public health, healthcare, and social service entities – places like DHEC, DHHS, DJJ, large health systems (give example of large health system in your area) or similar.
  - a. How do you feel that they interact with the community? What has been your experience?
  - b. Do you see yourself as a community resident or some of the grassroots organizations that you all have named working alongside these entities to help with community related efforts?
    - i. What does that working relationship look like? What is needed for that relationship to work?
- 12) In our last discussion, we talked about whether organizations engage with communities. Thinking about community engagement, what are some characteristics of community members who seem more engaged?
- 13) We want to talk about groups of community members that seem less engaged than others.
  - a. Thinking about those who are less engaged,
    - i. Why do you think they may be less engaged?
  - b. What do you think it would take to get these folks more engaged?
    - i. Thinking about racial and ethnic diversity, can you describe groups that we may have not talked about?

If you are *in-person* for this discussion, you can just go around the room for the icebreaker.

If you are *virtual*, call on people one-by-one, so you make sure everyone has an opportunity to respond.

In both cases, you as the facilitator should go first to provide an example

- 14) Now, let's talk a little about trust. Before we started these open mic sessions, we interviewed some leaders in this community about community engagement. They mentioned that sometimes organizations, even state level ones, are not trusted by the community. What is your reaction to that statement?
- i. By a show of hands, how many of you think that this is true sometimes?
    1. What makes a community not trust an organization?
- 15) That wraps up the things that we wanted to talk about, is there anything else you'd like for us to know that we haven't talked about today?
- 16) Do you have any questions for us?

### **CALL TO ACTION**

That will complete this open mic table discussion, thank you again for your participation. We would like to meet with you as a group again, once we have looked at the findings.

For our next session, we invite you to come back to the next session to hear the initial themes and findings from the two discussions that we have had to verify the findings. Again, we ask that you think about ways that you may want to get involved within your community. This could be engaging in a conversation with your neighbor, friend, and/or a family member about community engagement and thinking through how to become more active in community endeavors if you desire to do so.

Our team will work on the analysis to pull out common themes and summarize what we heard to share at the next session.

If today is your first session and you have not completed the demographics form, please do so before leaving today. Thank you.

### **DATE OF NEXT SESSION**

Facilitator: Discuss potential next date for session two with the group. Try to confirm or pinpoint a date before leaving the session.

[Facilitators: Please distribute gift cards to each participant.]

Let's look at our calendars to schedule a time within the next month for the next session.

Thank you again for your time!