From Recuperation to Life-Long Leadership: Consumer Governance in Medical Respite
What is Consumer Engagement in Governance?

- Inviting consumers to participate in the governance structures of the organization to help shape policies, procedures, and service delivery.
- Moving beyond passive feedback mechanisms towards developing proactive partnerships that bring consumers to the decision-making table.
## Consumer Advisory Boards

A group of homeless and/or formerly homeless individuals, advocates, providers, and community members brought together to improve services and delivery of care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCH Services</td>
<td>• Reviews and recommends program services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Feedback</td>
<td>• Solicits and communicates suggestions and grievances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Awareness</td>
<td>• Organizes or speaks at community events or forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>• Advocates throughout community for rights of consumers</td>
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Why Engage Consumers in Governance?

• Helps decision-makers understand the needs and experiences of consumers from the consumer point of view.
• Keeps governing boards focused on the needs of the special population
• Supports our values of client self-determination and inclusion
• Combines feedback mechanisms with critical leadership development
## Developing Consumer Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Recruiting</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Managing</th>
<th>Evaluating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Engage community</td>
<td>• Assess image</td>
<td>• Determine necessary knowledge or skills for position</td>
<td>• Assign a staff liaison</td>
<td>• Design the evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Define mission</td>
<td>• Consider volunteer motivations</td>
<td>• Develop orientation program and materials</td>
<td>• Communicate regularly with volunteers</td>
<td>• Collect data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assess organization</td>
<td>• Develop recruitment plan</td>
<td>• Develop orientation program and materials</td>
<td>• Provide ongoing training</td>
<td>• Analyze results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Define volunteer positions</td>
<td>• Develop message</td>
<td>• Schedule and conduct orientation</td>
<td>• Avoid volunteer burnout</td>
<td>• Report results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop implementation plan</td>
<td>• Find and select volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognize volunteer efforts</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q u a l i t y  | A c c e s s  | J u s t i c e  | C o m m u n i t y  | n h c h c . o r g
Start where you can
Consumer Considerations

• Environments, meetings, and interactions must ensure dignity, create safety, and foster empathy through a trauma-informed lens.
  • Nurture a non-judgmental and open-minded approach
  • Attend to emotions and the emotional climate of meetings
  • Cultivate relationships within the group

• Find ways to share power with consumer leaders.
  • Develop opportunities for consumer leaders to guide the work and enhance their skills.
Organizational Considerations

• Building consumer leadership and a supportive organizational structure takes time, resources, and energy.
  • Make sure to consider the direct and indirect costs (staff time and resources for recruitment, training, and management).
  • Needs both administrative and leadership development support.

• Feedback cannot go into a black hole
  • The organization needs to develop a feedback loop for the consumer engagement mechanism so consumer’s know what is done with their contributions.
Recruitment

• Relationships are critical for successful recruitment
  • Find out about people’s interests, passions, goals, and skills. Connect those to the opportunities to engage.

• Volunteers give their time to organizations they consider valuable and where they can make a difference.
  • When developing a plan and message, consider why volunteers should give their time to the organization.

• Advertise and promote these opportunities often and in a variety of ways.
Recruitment Ideas

• Get recommendations from providers, community partners, current consumer leaders, or leaders in the community with the lived experience.
  • Behavioral health or case management providers who spend the most time with clients may be able to gauge consumers' core values or potential for key skills.
• Promote opportunities at other client groups and all site locations.
• Post flyers
• Have current consumer leaders engage do ‘in-reach' by talking to consumers to build relationships and invite them to future meetings.
• Use feedback mechanisms to recruit participants from focus groups and listening sessions.
  • Consider topic-based focus groups so people can plug into discussions they are interested in.
  • Use current consumer leaders to facilitate these sessions to develop spaces for new attendees to feel comfortable in, and build leadership development for current members.
Overcoming Challenges

• Limited funding means that priority goes to client care.
  • Creating time and space now for improvement or consumer engagement can help to improve clinic flow or develop spokespeople to help with funders.

• Programs may have consumers in different locations, making it difficult to build community or find a common meeting space that current and former clients are comfortable accessing.
  • Developing community space for staff and consumers to connect helps to fulfill our emotional needs and can help consumers heal from trauma.
Success Strategies

• Short-term services and acute care focus on immediate well-being and can make it difficult to form long-term relationships
  • Build relationships when people start at the program, and maintain relationships with alumni. Let alumni know about the engagement options when they leave.

• Having limited staff makes it difficult to provide the necessary support
  • Encourage all staff to have conversations with their clients about the structural causes of housing and health injustice.
Resources

• From Recuperation to Life-Long Leadership: Consumer Governance in Medical Respite

• If You Build it, Will They Come? Recruiting and Retaining Consumers Experiencing Homelessness in Health Center Governance

• Guidance for CAB Support Staff
  • Available at: https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/cab-support-staff-guidance.pdf

• Consumer Advisory Board Manual