

To: Front and Centered Board of Directors
From: Giovanna Arizpe, E.G., and H.T.
Re: Duwamish River Cleanup Public Engagement Strategy
Date: November 1, 2023

Background

In 2021, the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act was signed and requires Washington state agencies to address environmental concerns and stipulates an engagement of historically overburdened and vulnerable communities, like the 70% of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community members living in the Lower Duwamish Waterway (LDW) area. The 2023 - 2025 Washington State Department of Health's strategic plan does not stipulate guidelines for affected LDW neighborhoods to identify and select Community Based Organizations (CBO) that prioritize advocacy, accessibility, and citizen involvement while valuing public engagement through a health equitable lens to obtain site cleanup funding. Neighborhood members emphasized the following LDW cleanup site concerns: 1) Fear that a polluted LDW negatively affects the health and the image of the community and 2) Economic impact of cleaning/not cleaning LDW. Front and Centered is working alongside state agencies to adopt a community plan that details engagement with communities and vulnerable populations, specifically South Park and Georgetown neighborhoods.

Problem Statement

There is an absence of conclusive citizen involvement standards regarding CBO selection in the HEAL Act. This lack of structure jeopardizes not equitably addressing community concerns and jeopardizes dispersing funds to clean up the Lower Duwamish Waterway.

Recommended Strategy

As outlined in our [2023 HEAL Progress Report](#), we recommend that the Front and Centered Board promotes the following short- and long-term solutions to the Department of Ecology (and relevant entities) to select CBO appropriate funding recipients: establishing an Asset Map and a Community Assembly Network.

- **Short-term:** A collaborative 2023 Asset Map creates a visual representation of the entities, relationships, and channels of information and influence that displays the area's ecosystem of services, leaders, and entities. Constructing more localized criterion on the Asset Map, by including survey data and community input, can identify which CBOs are led by and serve marginalized community members to promote environmental justice in accordance with the HEAL Act. Users must further analyze the map for gaps and overlaps in services with state and local agencies and organizational coalitions. Community participation in the mapmaking process is critical to ensure that the local landscape is represented equitably and effectively.
- **Long-term:** Establish a [Community Assembly Network](#) by inviting key stakeholder groups into an assembly network to define community needs and mobilize solution-driven actions. This network will provide a framework for joint advocacy and problem solving and should include community hubs for information and organizing such as Georgetown Community Council, South Park Community Center, Seattle Public Library, and Duwamish Tribal spaces. This network creates a structure for engagement in which underrepresented stakeholders can participate in shared decision making and have their concerns addressed.

Risks:

1. Community members and CBOs may lack interest in participating due to distrust in governmental cleanup efforts and historical disenfranchisement.
2. Collective leadership in a Community Assembly Network may result in differing interests and lack of clarity in responsibility delegation.

Benefits:

1. Cleanup is successful, creating community pride and engagement, economic growth, and increased environmental benefits in the LDW.
2. Diverse citizen representation allows the community to adapt and respond to future concerns, working alongside local government and community organizations.
3. Creates a blueprint for effective asset mapping for future projects within the LDW community and across Washington State.

Although the proposed short- and long-term recommendations may result in lack of community interest and differing interests, the benefits outweigh any potential risks as this historically disenfranchised community will have their voices heard. Front and Centered should prioritize the selected CBO understanding the roots of mistrust in the community surrounding government and the cleanup efforts while strategizing work toward building trust with the community. Additionally, a CBO with experience building collective leadership spaces would mitigate the disruption risk of responsibility delegation to community work in the long-term.

Implementation Considerations

Diversity: Front and Center needs to begin their implementation by recognizing the diversity of the community they are trying to engage in and ensure that the funded CBO represents the diversity of the communities. For community members to feel engaged and interested in being involved, they need to see themselves represented, with special attention given to communities who have been historically disenfranchised including tribal communities, immigrant communities, and non-native English speakers. This diverse community needs to have a seat at the table to feel empowered during the cleanup of their home and community.

Accessibility: The funded CBO must prioritize accessibility for community members. Community interviews recorded many concerns related to the LDW Superfund site. The chosen CBO must plan to work on the ground within the community, to advertise public participation activities and promote engagement. The CBO must plan to disperse project related information in the community's spoken languages and ensure public participation activities are held at a variety of days/time to accommodate work schedules.

Mission and Values: The chosen CBO must have values and a mission statement that aligns with Front and Centered organization because the two will be working closely together. Solidarity, transparency, and collaborative leadership are critical pillars. A focus on equity, citizen engagement, and advocacy around environmental justice are necessary to represent the people of the LDW. The CBO must be committed to fully participate in the community engagement process required by the Department of Ecology and HEAL Act until the lower Duwamish River cleanup is complete.

References

1. *Public Values: Table 1: Elicited Public Values, by Category* (Beck Jorgensen, Bozeman): The public values inventory, figures and tables provided a starting point of analyzing HEAL Act's public values and its relationship to the public. The HEAL Act's enactment prioritized a coordinated and collaborated approach for state agencies to ensure environmental justice and address the consequential disparities in overburdened and vulnerable populations. The Act's emphasis on ensuring sustainability, citizen involvement, and protection of minorities by mandating vulnerable community contribution to address environmental health illustrates the Act's public values of contributing to society and transforming interests to decisions. As a result, we centered around solutions that address those values in our memo recommendations.
2. *Administrative Racism: Public Administration Education and Race* (Starke, Heckler & Mackey): The article provided conceptual guidance in the memo's implementation considerations and accessibility section. The article discusses that the failure to prioritize and understand racism, specifically in the United States, creates a cyclical perpetuation of white perspectives and the "technical rationality" justification which create policies that ignore and negatively affect disenfranchised populations. The application of administrative racism is evident throughout LDW's history as the "destruction" of the in 1920 waterway, an area originally inhabited by the Duwamish Tribe and later transformed into a farming town comprising of Italian and Japanese farmers, let ships, barges, and other manufacturing and drum reconditioning contaminate the area and subsequently harm BIPOC community members. The HEAL Act seeks to remedy the racial disparity, our Implementation Consideration uses the Antiracism Cyle by engaging implementors to consider racial elements and subsequent participation of LDW's cleanup.
3. *What to Do When Stakeholders Matter: Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Techniques* (Bryson): The article discusses that stakeholders need attention throughout the management process to ensure the success and a failure to attend to information and stakeholder concerns predictably leads to deficient performance. This helps us understand why the HEAL Act wanted to incorporate members of the community: to ensure that those who are affected have a say and solidify the success of the implementation.
4. *A Note on Mapping: Understanding Who Can Influence Your Success* (Dobel and Day): This article explains the importance of mapping as a tool to identify crucial factors and forces that help or hinder achieving policy goals by determining which actors should be included. Chosen actors should have a stake in the activity and build upon human and institutional relationships to sustain organizational competence. This article supports our conclusion to create an asset map for CBOs ensuring that the selection of CBOs represents the communities' interests.