

Effective Use of **LIVED EXPERIENCE**



What is lived experience?

Lived experience is the knowledge based in someone's perspective, personal identities, and history. It isn't just what happened in your life, it includes what we can learn from it. This knowledge is essential to identifying systemic issues and finding creative solutions to complex problems.

This experience varies from person to person, and all experiences are valid. It can be personal, professional, or observed. Connections between shared identities and experiences can shed light on larger systemic and structural issues.

Sharing lived experiences makes a person vulnerable. As such, it is important to acknowledge this vulnerability, and use an approach that is both empowering and trauma-informed.

Do:

- Acknowledge cultural and systemic beliefs and barriers that may contribute to trust and perceptions of government, systems, and your organization.
- Focus on building relationships, connection and trust.
- Make policy accessible, use a variety of engagement strategies.
- Be honest and transparent. Create space for volunteers to be honest and transparent with you. Embrace awkward conversations.
- Seek input from anyone willing to give it.
- Validate people's experiences by letting them know how you will use their input and the impact that it will have (or had, if a change was implemented).
- Offer resources, training, and tools to assist people in becoming effective advocates.
- Be accountable to the goals of people with lived experience.



Don't:

- Put anyone in a position that may cause harm. It is ok to be vulnerable, but not too vulnerable.
- Require rigid processes, paperwork and expectations.
- Shut down any opinions or feedback.
- Use engagement strategies that create barriers to participation.
- Tokenize or use lived experience for sympathy. This perpetuates stigma.
- Seek specific lived experience that exemplifies certain perspectives (such as requiring sobriety, stability, success, compliance, etc).
- Over-incentivize participation, this is likely to decrease honesty and transparency.
- Limit participation to those that will not need much coaching.
- Disregard the power dynamic that exists between leaders and consumers.



Want to learn more? Contact Amy Lyden at AmyL@jcmh.org
jcmh.org/advocacy | 720-202-7357