



**BUILDING THE PRACTICE OF
COMMUNITY COACHING IN SOUTH JERSEY**
Operational Guide

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Introduction

This operational guide builds on a companion landscape report to help organizational leaders establish community coaching as a support for change efforts. The intended audience for this guide is staff and board members of the Community Foundation of South Jersey. Additional potential audiences include other funders, intermediary organizations, public agencies, or similar entities seeking to leverage community coaching as a support for their community change efforts. This guide uses the term “program manager” to encompass the broad variety of entities that could be directing the work.

Inside, you will find guiding questions and learnings from the accompanying landscape report to help program managers think through what they can do to ensure coaching leads to good outcomes for community members. Because community change efforts are so diverse - in purpose, scale, location, target population, timeline, and more - this guide cannot tell program managers exactly how to engage and deploy community coaches. It can, however, help you avoid common pitfalls in coaching programs and anticipate challenges you may face operationalizing the work.

At the end of the guide, a Resource Appendix links to readings, trainings, worksheets and more, to help program managers support their coaches and build their toolbox.

When is coaching not a good fit?

Our working definition of community coaching, drawn from current practitioners is “Community coaching is providing a group of people that want to come together with the tools to be successful in meeting their goals.” A necessary prerequisite, therefore, is a community that *wants* to change and wants to do so together. Published research and interviews with current coaches caution against overestimating a community’s willingness to change.¹ Resistance will be particularly high if the impetus to change is coming from outside the community. **The discussion and recommendations in this operational guide assume a community that is ready and willing to work together for change.**

¹ Author’s notes, informational interview, January 2023, and Kenneth Cohen, Lorie Higgins, Nick Sanyal, and Charles Harris, “Community Coaching: Answering the Call for Innovative Approaches to Community-Based Development Initiatives”, *Community Development*, 39, no. 4 (2008): 80. doi: 10.1080/15575330809489659

Deciding to engage a community coach

The first decision to be made is whether or not a community coach can help. Below are questions to consider:

- What are we seeking to improve?
Coaches are most often found supporting change towards health equity, improved sense of community identity, economic vitality, or a combination of the three. Other domains that require cross-sector engagement and collaboration may also benefit from coaching.
- How far-reaching is the change?
Coaches work at a community scale to guide and support groups of people and/or organizations working for systemic change.
- Could one leader (person, government official, or organization) with influence and authority accomplish this on their own?
Coaches add value to efforts that require buy-in and collaboration from multiple local stakeholders - individual residents, local organizations, or both - to make change happen.
- Who will set the goals and direct the work?
When local stakeholders have agency to make decisions about the direction of the work and how to get it done, a coach can help them make and execute plans.
- How long will we work on this?
Community change is a multi-year process. The scale of the desired change should inform the number of years the program manager intends to commit to the effort, but the opposite is also true. If the program manager can commit no more than 2-3 years, then the change effort should be limited to a realistic scale.

Community Readiness

The community also needs to be in a position to benefit from coaching. One former foundation staff member, describing a program's failings, said "the biggest mistake we made was that we didn't pay enough attention to whether communities were ready or not. I think there's responsibility on the part of an external funder, whenever you go into a long-term relationship, to spend a lot of time thinking about what it may take for a community to succeed."² Consider a readiness assessment to help assess factors that may help or inhibit change. The "Community Readiness Handbook" from the Tri-Ethnic Research Center at Colorado State University is widely referenced and cited in discussions of readiness for change. Tri-Ethnic Center's Handbook, including its measures of readiness, is linked in the Resource Appendix.

One alternative model is Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery's "Levels of Current Capacity" grid, seen on the next page.³

² FSG, "Gaining perspective: Lessons learned from one foundation's exploratory decade", Northwest Area Foundation (2011): 25. Accessed from: <https://www.fsg.org/publications/gaining-perspective>

³ Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Engaging in Sustainable Community Change: A Community Guide to Working with a Coach*, (2009), 3. Accessed from: <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/engaging-in-sustainable-community-change-a-community-guide-to-working-with-a-coach.html>

Characteristics of Community Change	Levels of Current Capacity					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
People are open to bringing in outside help.						
People are open to sharing and learning together.						
Local groups are connected and trust each other; spirit for collaboration.						
People focus on the discovery and appreciation of local assets.						
An emerging vision for the future is widely shared in the community.						
The leadership team believes it has the power to make change.						
A big challenge calls people together with a sense of urgency.						
A hopeful attitude is present despite the challenges.						
A game plan or roadmap for the community is in process.						
Community sparkplugs (people who keep the flame) are willing to champion the effort.						
A good-sized and representative group is committing time and energy to the work.						
Cultural brokering across community differences is evident.						
Change agents express willingness to be coached and to serve.						
People understand how a coach will work for and with the community.						

What if the community is “not ready”?

In the past year, a blog series⁴ from social sector consulting firm TCC Group has challenged the notion of readiness as a stable set of conditions a community or organization must possess before the real work of change can begin. The authors advocate instead for an understanding of readiness that is “malleable, context-specific, accounting for history & values, and jointly & explicitly determined⁵” with communities. This lens on readiness can be applied to assessment tools to produce a more nuanced awareness of what resources and assets a community already has, and where more supports can help.

⁴ TCC Group, “Now is the time to Radically Reimagine Readiness,” *TCC Group* (April 2023). Accessed from: <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/now-is-the-time-to-radically-reimagine-readiness/>

⁵ TCC Group, “Now is the time to Radically Reimagine Readiness.”

Pre-Work to Improve the Chances of Success

Before the coach begins collaborating with community members, the program manager must make a few key decisions to set things up for success. Program parameters are both helpful and necessary; like bumper guards at the bowling alley, they allow room for movement within a certain lane and keep community teams from falling into a proverbial gutter. Below are key questions for program managers to decide in advance of the program's start.

Program Structure

- What is the timeline for the program?
Most community coaching programs commit 2-5 years to a community, and the median length is 4 years. Programs that intend to work with multiple communities in a larger geographic area may choose to begin work in waves (e.g., three communities in Year 1, three in Year 4, three in Year 6, etc.) to allow opportunity for lessons learned in the first cohort to be applied later.
- Who is defining the community and how?
The landscape report highlighted that a community boundary defined by an external entity may hinder efforts to make change if it is neither relevant nor meaningful to the people within. If a community readiness assessment was utilized as part of the earlier work, community members may have already been involved in defining their own boundaries. If not, build time at the beginning of the engagement to work with community residents in creating the definition.
- What resources will the program manager provide?
In addition to the community coach's time, a program manager may be providing funds for the community to hire a coordinator and pay for project expenses or participation stipends. Some offer matching funds to supplement community fundraising. Some offer no funding but provide training or technical assistance to communities at no cost.
- What supports will the coach provide?
Most community coaches are in the community, meeting with residents or organizational representatives in person, at least once a month. Often coaches attend community meetings or events as well; some run those meetings and some simply listen and take notes. Determine how much the coach is expected to do for the community, knowing that flexibility will be necessary.

Program Goals and Governance

- What is the program manager's overarching goal for the community change effort?
The entity managing the program has its own mission and set of goals that inform what kinds of work it supports. Transparency about these goals can allow the program manager to build on a foundation of shared knowledge with communities and avoid later conflict and confusion.
- What are the goals within the community?
Emery's Field Guide to Community Coaching notes that "coaching works best when community stakeholders see their work with a coach as an opportunity to help achieve local goals and

ambitions.”⁶ Include discussion of community goals and ambitions in the readiness assessment. If a readiness assessment was not done prior to beginning the change effort, a coach can work through it with community members to surface interests and goals.

- Where do these two sets of goals align? Where do they differ?
Program manager goals and community goals will likely not fully align. Where they do, the coach can draw on this shared sense of purpose to motivate community members. Where they do not, the program manager could agree to pursue some degree of less aligned goals that keep people happy and engaged, or it could engage in frank discussion about why that can't happen.
- Who can say yes? Who has the power to say no?
Assess, realistically, questions of control over the work. Residents may not be familiar with the structures of meetings and planning that institutions bring to the table⁷ and may prefer to self-organize in other ways. Residents may have different ideas about where project funds should be spent and how quickly. Management staff may also hold different ideas about how the program is implemented. One evaluation “found inconsistencies in how the [community change] strategy is currently implemented within and across region.... the criteria and practices concerning the strategy have been adjusted and adapted without thorough discussions about the line between fidelity and responsiveness.”⁸ Having those conversations about fidelity and responsiveness supports perceptions equity across communities when all feel they are being treated fairly and consistently.

Recommendation: document the process and outcome of all key decisions and share with all parties involved to enhance transparency. Consider FAQ's or another quick-reference source that community members, coaches, and staff can refer back to.

⁶ Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell, and Becky Miles-Polka, *A Field Guide to Community Coaching*, (2011), 37. Accessed from: https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/cyfar_research_docs/A%20Field%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Coaching.pdf

⁷ Cohen, 77.

⁸ Community Science, “CPHE Macro Evaluation Report, 2020-2022,” February 1, 2022, page 14. Accessed from: https://www.coloradotrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Website-TCT-Story_-Cross-Site-VF.pdf

Resident-led vs. Resident-informed

Several program managers have documented their struggles trying to balance leading the program, with stepping back to allow community members to lead. One Colorado Trust staff member described how the situation unfolded when left too open: “Residents quickly began to come up with requests that challenged our notion of resident-led work. Could communities determine the amount of funding they received? ... Would the Trust fund services that local government was responsible for? Would the foundation fund improvements to private property?... If the work is resident-led, why, they asked, do communities have to go through an established process?”⁹

Ultimately for this program manager, “The needs of the foundation to have consistent structures and systems in place came into conflict with desire to be truly resident driven.”¹⁰ Ceding power to community members is a new practice for many institutions and misunderstandings about exactly how much power is at stake can be fraught. Program managers need to be realistic with themselves, even with their own staff, about how much freedom residents will have.

⁹ Courtney Ricci, Nancy Csuti, and Mia Ramirez, (2021). “The Revolution Within: What It Really Takes to Partner with Communities,” *The Foundation Review* 13, no. 2 (June 2021): 108. <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1568>

¹⁰ Ricci, 110.

Hiring and Training

A positive working relationship with the community is an important prerequisite for coaching success. While much of the relationship formation is the responsibility of the coach, the program manager bears responsibility for hiring the right person and for ensuring the coach is equipped to effectively communicate the vision and goals of the effort.

Matching a coach with a community

In most programs, coaches are hired by the program manager and assigned to a community. But, some experts recommend that community members be involved in coach selection to ensure a good fit.¹¹ To the extent possible, program managers should work with community members to determine what supports are most needed and select a coach who has those skills.

- What skills are most needed?
The most commonly cited community coaching skills identified in the landscape report are facility with building relationships, promoting inclusion, project management, facilitation, and motivating people. Community members can speak to what works in their setting, where and how change efforts have failed in the past, and what barriers feel insurmountable.
- Can the coach commit to this community?
One article on coaching reminds us that “like any relationship, building trust requires confidentiality and consistency, with the same coach available for the duration of the project engagement.”¹²
- What professional background does the coach bring?
Backgrounds vary widely. Coaches often have prior experience in community, organizational, or economic development, teaching, consulting, government, or project management. A diverse set of professional and/or volunteer experience in a variety of settings can be helpful for building the coach’s ability to adapt and respond to new contexts.
- Insider vs. Outsider status
Coaches are typically “outsiders,” separate from existing social networks and power dynamics. Outsider status supports a coach’s ability to bridge silos, observe and name group behaviors, and foster community ownership of the project. However, insider status - where the coach is a member of the community - can be helpful for motivating participation, especially in cases with high barriers to entry (e.g., mistrust related to previous interventions from outsiders, community isolation, etc.) Coaches who begin as outsiders may find their position naturally shifts over time as they become more familiar with and embedded in the community. Attention to this changing dynamic is important to ensure the community continues to build ownership and the coach remains unbiased.
- Additional considerations
Other characteristics of the community may inform coach selection. Is there a significant population speaking a language other than English? How will they be included in the project? Are there other

¹¹ Hubbell and Emery, *Engaging in Sustainable Change*, 3.

¹² Antonia Lewis, Elena Tamanas Ragusa, and Jonathan P. Scaccia, 2022. “Coaching Practice in Public Health Partnerships: The Role of Coaching in Advancing Community-Based, Public Health Collaboration.” Monograph, New Jersey Health Initiatives.

cultural identities that influence how the community lives and works together? Much of the research on community coaching has taken place in upper midwestern states, where Native American identity and tribal affiliation affect the coaching context. In New Jersey, where foreign-born residents make up 23% of the state population¹³, a program manager might consider country of origin or immigration status within the community. Understanding of and respect for diverse cultural identities is important in all contexts, but especially critical in a state like New Jersey.

Frameworks and Training

If the program employs several coaches working in different communities concurrently, a shared framework or training provides common language across coaches and greater consistency in program delivery. Some examples of the kinds of level-setting done by other programs include:

- Community Heart & Soul and the programs using its model define a four-stage process for community engagement and planning. Heart & Soul coaches are trained in this process, which then gives them the ability to talk to other Heart & Soul coaches - even in different states - using a shared language about the community's progress and challenges.¹⁴
- Similarly, the Horizons program used a four-stage process to guide community members through development and implementation of an action plan.¹⁵
- Dakota Resources enrolled its coach cohort in trainings for facilitation skills and "Strategic Doing," an approach to building collaborations and activating people towards a goal.¹⁶ The trainings provide baseline skills in coaching techniques that can equalize the "toolbox" each coach brings to their assigned community.

As discussed previously, inconsistencies in program delivery can arise from different understandings of program goals, policies, and procedures. Absent a standard framework and training, these differences can, in turn, give rise to inequities in community decision-making power when it comes to questions like participation stipends, early action projects, or reporting standards. At the same time, a program that seeks to empower community members must allow for flexibility to respond to the unique circumstances within each community.

Recommendation: establish clear expectations for program delivery to be shared with coaches. Communicate the program manager's policies and procedures to coaches and to community teams. Spend time with coaches discussing where the program can be flexible and how necessary adjustments should be communicated.

¹³ American Immigration Council, "Fact Sheet: Immigrants in New Jersey," August 6, 2020. Accessed from: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-new-jersey>

¹⁴ Community Heart & Soul, "Coach Training Program" (Community Heart & Soul, (2022), 6-9.

¹⁵ Ryan Allen & Paul R. LaChapelle, "Can leadership development act as a rural poverty alleviation strategy?", *Community Development*, 43, no. 1, (2012): 96. doi: 10.1080/15575330.2011.645046

¹⁶ Author's notes, informational interview, November 2022.

Getting Started

Once a coach is selected and oriented to the program's goals and approach, it's time to get the work off the ground. Forming relationships, getting to know the social networks, and understanding power structures are all part of the important early work facing a community coach. At the same time, the coach may feel pressure to produce quick results that keep community members interested in participating. Program managers can help by making the critical first connection in the community and by allocating resources to early demonstrations projects.

Gaining Entry

One of the first tasks of a coach is to “gain entry” to the community. Gaining entry, as defined by Cohen and co-authors, is “a strategy for approaching the community of interest to achieve access so that a program or research process effectively engages its intended audience.”¹⁷ The term could also be understood as the act of building the initial connections and trust necessary to do the rest of the work. Gaining entry happens right at the beginning of the project, but a coach may need to gain entry repeatedly throughout the process as new participants join or as resistance to new ideas surfaces. Pathways for gaining entry include:

- Being an insider
Coaches who are community insiders (as opposed to the far more common “outsider” status) will have existing relationships and social networks that can jump-start action on the project. However, an insider has to be able to identify the limits of their networks and reflect on potential bias, as well as be motivated to reach beyond their established connections to include everyone the program wants to reach.
- Through an intermediary organization
If a local organization will play a role in the program and they have strong relationships, staff at the organization can orient the coach to the formal and informal power structures within the community and make introductions. After a few introductions have begun opening doors, the coach should be careful to build their own understanding of community social networks and power structures to ensure that any institutional bias (perceived or real) is not unconsciously replicated.
- Through an ambassador
Different sources call this person (or people) a community coordinator, community champion, ambassador, or even co-coach.¹⁸ This is a member of the community who has insider knowledge of the cultural context, trusted relationships, and a strong interest in moving work forward.¹⁹ This person could serve a limited role in orienting the coach to the community and providing introductions, before becoming an equal member of the community team. Or, they could serve in a more formal role as a designated coordinator to handle day-to-day onsite work.

¹⁷ Cohen, 75.

¹⁸ Interview notes; Willhite, 36; Cohen, 76.

¹⁹ Taylor Willhite, “Impact of Coaching by Extension Professionals on Rural Wellness Coalition Success,” Masters Thesis, (South Dakota State University, 2020): 36. Accessed October 24, 2022 from: <https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/dissertations-theses/impact-coaching-extension-professionals-on-rural/docview/2406952488/se-2>.

Securing “early wins”

While any community change effort requires thorough and inclusive planning processes, overly long planning can dampen the initial enthusiasm residents carried into the process. One way to maintain community interest is to commit to early action projects defined by the interests of community members: repair a streetlight, hold a one-day food truck festival, clean up the park, etc. The short term, tangible improvement helps to prove the value of the effort and promote interest in doing more.

- In the Colorado Trust’s Community Partnerships strategy, these quick wins take the form of small grants to support one-time community activities: “[Short-term wins] demonstrated not only that the foundation was serious, but...also showed the broader community that resident teams were credible.”²⁰
- In his experience as a community coach, Kenneth Cohen recorded that “lining up some quick “wins” around a youth project took some of the edge off. I think the planning that went into the youth project, even though it was very brief, demonstrated the advantages of planning things through.”²¹

Successful early action projects demonstrate to the community at-large that the coach and the residents involved in the change effort have the ability to be effective. A program manager can support early wins by remaining flexible enough to allow the community to determine what sort of win they want to see first and by resourcing the project.

Recommendation: reserve a portion of the project budget for early actions. Be as flexible as possible in allowing community members to decide what that action should be, even if it is only loosely tied to the overall goal of the effort. Seeing their plan come to fruition will help build experience with and interest in planning for the larger change effort.

²⁰ Ricci, 110.

²¹ Cohen, 77.

Supports for coaches

Serving as a community coach can be a solitary role. The coach is always *with* the community, but not *of* the community. Sometimes a coach will encounter challenges or unfamiliar situations and will need help to figure out how to move the community forward. Countering the solitary nature of the work requires opportunity for collective experience with others who are similarly situated. In addition to the coaching frameworks and training that may have been provided upfront, program managers can provide additional support in the following ways.

Establish a community of practice

Initially coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, the term “community of practice” refers to “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”²² By gathering with others who do the same work, coaches can get support and develop skills from others who really “get it.”

- For coaching cohorts
Programs that employ multiple coaches at any given time sometimes offer regular meetings or calls to foster a community of practice. These meetings give coaches a chance to compare notes on what’s happening in their communities and get ideas from others. Meetings typically happen once or twice per month, online or in person, as determined by the geographic spread of coaches. A wealth of information on structuring communities of practice can be found in Etienne Wenger, Richard Arnold McDermott, and William Snyder’s book *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, linked in the Resource Appendix. An additional guide to facilitating communities of practice, developed by the University of Michigan, is also linked in the Appendix.
- For solo practitioners
If a program has engaged only one coach to work in multiple communities, consider sponsoring a coach’s membership in a professional organization such as Community Development Society.²³ Community Development Society (CDS) is a membership organization for academics, policymakers, and practitioners in community development, offering meetings, publications, and an annual conference to connect people in the field. A coach could also look for a community of practice through the International Coaching Federation²⁴ or a local consultant network.

²² Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, “An introduction to communities of practice: a brief overview of the concept and its uses,” Wenger-Trayner Consulting website (2015). Accessed April 3, 2023 from: <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice>.

²³ Community Development Society, <https://cdsociety.org/>

²⁴ ICF Communities of Practice: <https://coachingfederation.org/communities-of-practice>

Mentorship

In interviews, all community coaches who had a designated mentor described that person as helpful or extremely helpful. Having established time to discuss specific challenges allows the coach to get practical, personalized assistance from someone experienced with the process of community coaching.

In an established program, mentors may be drawn from the ranks of experienced coaches. In a new program without pre-existing relationships with experienced coaches, mentors may be identified through communities of practice or professional organizations. The International Coaching Federation offers a highly structured coach mentor program for credits towards its credentials²⁵, but effective mentoring can also be less formal. An introduction to a person experienced in community work or a connection during discussion in a community of practice can also form the basis of a mentoring relationship.

Recommendation: Offer ongoing opportunities for learning, either collectively or one-on-one. Coaches benefit, and ultimately, the communities they serve do too.

²⁵ International Coaching Federation, "Mentor Coaching," ICF website (2023). Accessed April 10, 2023 from: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/mentor-coaching>

Feedback and Evaluation Indicators

In interviews, some South Jersey coaches raised an issue with not having a structured way to get feedback from community members or to evaluate the effectiveness of their coaching practice. Coaches want to know if they are meeting the needs of their communities and if there are adjustments to their coaching practice that would help. Below are a few ways coaches can check in with community members and the program manager to receive this information.

Building in feedback loops

- Coach-community contracts

In *Guiding Sustainable Change*, Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery recommend a written contract between coach and community members to set expectations for the work together: community members name the kinds of supports they think they need and the coach describes what they can provide.²⁶ This is not a formal, legally binding document. Instead, it provides a basis for conversation about what supports are working as intended and what may need to be revised. Discussing the contract at regular intervals allows it to be updated to reflect the changing needs of the community as their work advances. Hubbell and Emery recommend using Appreciative Inquiry as a framing for feedback conversations,²⁷ as it will point participants towards a constructive conversation. A guide to Appreciative Inquiry is linked in the Resource Appendix.

- Communications and reporting

If the informal contract supports regular feedback conversations with community members, standard check-ins or progress reports can facilitate similar conversations with the program manager. Particularly at the beginning of a coaching engagement, program managers should allot time during the check-ins to discuss goal alignment.²⁸ Additional reporting and discussion items could include community progress, obstacles or barriers, and resources or support the coach needs to help the community move its work forward.

- Reflection

Coaches can also evaluate their own performance with reflection through journaling or other practices that support time for thinking. Over a period of weeks, months or years, coaches may see patterns emerge that can form the basis of a larger body of knowledge, either strictly for themselves or for the field. (Several of the articles that informed this guide and the landscape report are based on the lead author's notes from the time in which they served as a community coach.)²⁹

The "After Action Review" is an additional tool coaches can use for reflection with community members. This is a structured group conversation, initially developed by the military, which is now commonly used in business and social sector settings to work through: what was supposed to happen, what did happen, why the gap, and what can be done differently next time. Further

²⁶ Hubbell, *Guiding Sustainable Change*, 17.

²⁷ Emery, 66.

²⁸ Community change efforts can experience tension between goals imposed by the funder and grassroots, local goals. See the accompanying landscape report for further discussion of goals.

²⁹ Ryan Allen was a community coach for the Horizons program; Kenneth Cohen for an unnamed program in the upper Midwest; Ken Hubbell for the Mid-South Delta Initiative; and Antonia Lewis for New Jersey Health Initiatives.

information on the tool and a template for conducting an After-Action Review are linked in the Resource Appendix.

The landscape report did not identify any instances of formal performance evaluations for coaches, but it may be that they simply weren't mentioned in any written sources. A program manager who cultivates and maintains connections within the community can rely on information from those connections as an additional check on coach performance even without a formal performance evaluation.

Indicators of Effective Coaching

Building on any of the above feedback mechanisms, related indicators would show if coaching is having the desired impact. Community coaches are frequently involved in strengthening relationships, promoting inclusion, building community capacity, and helping community members to get the work done.³⁰ The following sample indicators can be used to assess progress.

- New connections and relationships between community members are established and developing
- Diverse voices representing the full community - especially those of historically marginalized people - are included and heard
- Diverse groups are working more effectively and productively together
- Belief in individual and collective ability to make positive change is increased
- Attitudes towards the change effort are overall positive within the community
- Leadership capacity is developed within the community
- An action plan is developed and “owned” by residents and/or community team members
- Reliance on the coach to facilitate conversations, resolve conflict, and/or define next steps is decreasing over time

Other indicators may relate to the overall goal of the program, for example: “knowledge of factors leading to health inequities is increased.”

Recommendation: most coaches want to know that their work is making a difference in the community. Offer structured or semi-structured ways for coaches to solicit and receive feedback from community members and from the program manager. Determine what changes would indicate progress is being made in the community thanks to coaching support and track the indicators.

³⁰ See Landscape Report, page 11.

Conclusion

Community coaching remains a somewhat under-the-radar tool for supporting community change, despite having been in use for decades. As social sector organizations and government agencies look for new ways to improve lives, community coaching is a relatively simple, yet powerful way to support community members in taking ownership of change. This operational guide offers guiding questions and best practices on program structure and decision-making authority, pre-work and early actions to take, supporting coaches, and building in feedback and evaluation. At the end of the guide, a resource appendix links to specific readings, trainings, and activities recommended by community coaches and others who work on-the-ground to make change.

Recommendations for Future Refinement

Bringing new people into the field of community coaching

Most of the South Jersey community coaches reflected that how they do their work guiding and supporting communities (as opposed to leading) is a natural extension of how they work with people in a variety of settings and jobs. Research and publications recognize the importance of this sort of coaching mindset in working with communities.³¹ If we accept that some people are naturally inclined towards a coaching mindset and that this inclination - even more so than professional skills - is a critical attribute for effective coaching, we have an opportunity to think differently about who is qualified to be a community coach. A coaching mindset paired with relevant lived experience may enable coaches to authentically connect (“gain entry”) with hard-to-reach communities where institutional outreach or professional credentials have failed. New coaches can be supported by mentor coaches and intentional communities of practice; experienced coaches likely stand to benefit just as much in a community of practice from new colleagues with different perspectives.

Testing indicators of effective coaching

This guide has suggested several potential measures program managers could use as evidence of effective coaching. These measures are informed by the specific skills highlighted most frequently by the accompanying landscape report but have not been field tested. Piloting the measures with community coaches will provide an opportunity to determine if the indicators are relevant, or if others might be more directly attributable to the coach’s work with community members.

³¹ See Community Coaching Landscape Report, page 14, for further discussion.

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Resource Appendix

1. Overall How-To, for perspectives on what community coaching is and isn't
 - 1.1. [A Field Guide to Community Coaching](#) by Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell, and Becky Miles-Polka
 - 1.2. Monographs that informed the Field Guide, for when you need a shorter text:
 - 1.2.1. [Guiding Sustainable Community Change: An Introduction to Coaching](#) by Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery
 - 1.2.2. [Engaging in Sustainable Community Change: A Community Guide to Working with a Coach](#) by Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery
 - 1.3. [Successful Engagement with People who Have Lived Experience](#), pdf workbook providing a step-by-step guide for professionals seeking to authentically engage community members. Helpful for organizations or individuals who need orientation to this work.
 - 1.4. [The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves](#) by Shawn Ginwright. Not specifically about coaching; instead, presents a different paradigm for social change and human connection.
2. Foundational trainings
 - 2.1. [Strategic Doing: Ten Skills for Agile Leadership](#), a 2.5-day training that describes itself as being best suited for complex collaboratives
 - 2.1.1. In book form: <https://a.co/d/4WVbsb6>
 - 2.2. [Technology of Participation](#) training, a package of facilitation methods
 - 2.3. [Connected Communities Curriculum](#), by Impact Service Corporation and New Kensington Community Development Corporation. Builds on the authors' study of trauma-informed community engagement to present a 6-workshop series that facilitators can use to teach others about trauma and its effects.
 - 2.4. [Community Readiness Handbook](#), Tri-Ethnic Research Center, Colorado State University, 2nd edition, 2014. For learning to look at a community's strengths and assets and identify gaps and areas for growth that could impede a change effort.
3. Community-building in person
 - 3.1. [13 Ways to Kill Your Community](#) by Doug Griffiths and Kelly Clemmer
 - 3.2. [The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging](#) by Charles Vogl
 - 3.3. [The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters](#) by Priya Parker, a book on defining purpose and structuring interactions for more meaningful gatherings
 - 3.3.1. Online at: <https://www.priyaparker.com/gathering-toolkit>
4. Community-building online
 - 4.1. [The Community Club](#), a resource hub for online community managers. Geared towards for-profit businesses, but many learnings are applicable across sectors.
 - 4.2. [Putting the TEAM back into virtual teams](#), a research article on organizational dynamics; see table on page 3 for the main tips
 - 4.3. [12 *Actually Not Awkward* Virtual Icebreakers for Remote Meetings](#), a blog post with icebreaker ideas rated by level of effort required and level of team closeness

- 4.4. [Rituals for Virtual Meetings: Creative Ways to Engage People and Strengthen Relationships](#) by Kursat Ozenc and Glenn Fajardo, a book of rituals for online gatherings
5. Designing and facilitating meetings and gatherings
 - 5.1. [The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decisionmaking](#) by Lenny Lind and Sam Kaner
 - 5.2. [The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash a Culture of Innovation](#) by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless
 - 5.2.1. Exercises available online at <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/>
 - 5.3. [Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation](#) by adrienne marie brown
 - 5.3.1. Builds on [Emergent Strategy](#) by adrienne marie brown
6. Bridging differences
 - 6.1. [Enhancing cultural competence](#), part of the "Community Toolbox" from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.
 - 6.2. [Culturally responsive coaching is more than just good coaching](#), blog post on how the writer (a white woman) weaves self-reflection on social identity into the work of coaching
 - 6.3. [Racial literacy workshops and group trainings](#), from The Lion's Story, an organization founded by and building on the work of Dr. Howard Stevenson. The Lion's Story seeks to increase racial literacy: the ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful social interactions and narratives.
 - 6.4. [Moving from Transactional to Transformational: How to Re-Imagine Volunteer Engagement with Breauna Dorelus](#), podcast episode on reimagining the relationship between community and volunteers towards co-liberation and empowerment
7. Troubleshooting
 - 7.1. Motivating disengaged residents: [Increasing participation and engaging stakeholders in change efforts](#), part of the "Community Tool Box" from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.
 - 7.2. Attending to trust building: [Turf, Trust, Co-Creation, and Collective Impact](#) from the Tamarack Institute.
 - 7.3. Managing polarization in groups: [12 Tools to Foster Alignment and Collaboration](#) from consulting firm CoCreative. Provides simple prompts and exercises to help a group stay focused and collaborative.
 - 7.4. Reaching decisions as a group: [A short guide to consensus decisionmaking](#), from Seeds of Change UK. A step-by-step process for reaching consensus with a group with tips for facilitators and participants.
8. Feedback and Evaluation
 - 8.1. [Guide to Appreciative Inquiry](#) from research and evaluation firm FSG. Provides a detailed description of the practice, facilitation guide, and sample questions.
 - 8.2. [Coaching Performance Self-Assessment](#). This tool was developed for family-centered coaching but could be adapted to community coaching with just a few adjustments.

9. Tools for reflection
 - 9.1. After Action Reviews
 - 9.1.1. Harvard Business Review: [A Better Approach to After Action Reviews](#)
 - 9.1.2. [Template for conducting an AAR](#) in Google slide format
 - 9.2. [Reflective Practice for Facilitators](#), blog post on reflection, including journal prompts
 - 9.3. [5 Journal Alternatives for People Who Simply Don't Wanna](#) This magazine article provides some light reading on ways to engage in reflection that are not centered on language.

10. Support for coaches
 - 10.1. [Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge](#) book by Etienne Wenger, Richard A. McDermott, and William M. Snyder.
 - 10.2. [Community of Practice Facilitation Guide](#), University of Michigan Center for Positive Organizations. See pages 6-10 for generalizable principles.
 - 10.3. [Seven Habits of Highly Effective Mentors](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review article providing tips to mentors on how to cultivate a positive, productive relationship