The Colorado Health Foundation™

# Equity-centered Community Design Process Toolkit

# Welcome

Welcome to the Equity-centered Community Design Toolkit (ECCD)!

The ECCD process is a unique creative problem-solving process based on equity, humility-building, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community. This toolkit is designed to provide you with opportunities to facilitate the ECCD process that brings communities together to create outdoor spaces that reflect the community's history, culture and legacy.

There may be areas of the engagement process where you need ideas/support in bringing diverse creators to the table - that's what this toolkit has been developed to do.

We encourage you to reach out should you have questions about the ECCD process or if you and your community are in need of consultative support. Feel free to contact your program officer or Senior Program Officer Collinus Newsome at cnewsome@coloradohealth.org at your convenience.

# Why Equity-centered Community Design?

### What is Equity-centered Community Design (ECCD)?

Equity-centered Community Design, created by Antionette Carroll of Creative Reaction Lab, is a unique creative problem-solving process based on equity, humility-building, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community.

Here is a video by Antoinette Carroll about her journey to becoming an equity-focused designer.



This design process focuses on highlighting a community's cultural capital while assessing its needs so that it can gain tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all.

### Why integrate Equity-centered Community Design into the Built Environment?

ECCD is a flexible system for intersectional issues. When solving problems for complex, real-world issues, the process is not linear nor step-by-step. ECCD allows for various combinations when addressing different challenges and/or situations. Also, within the ECCD process, the
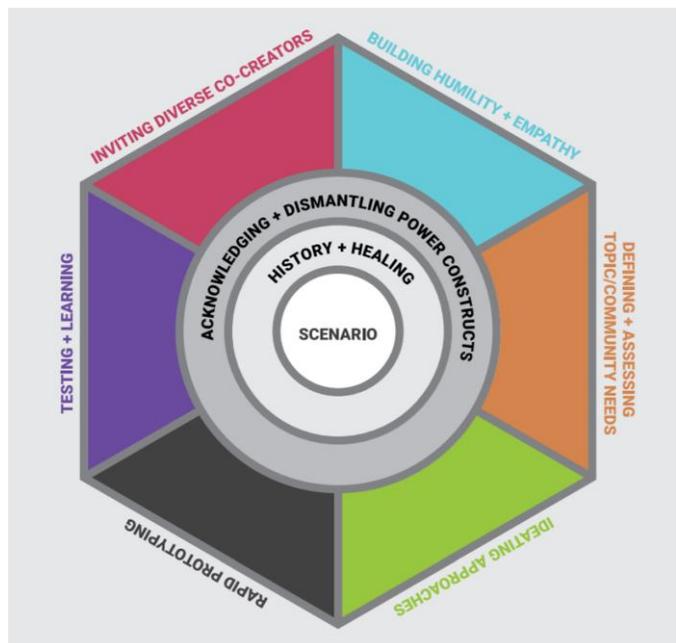
integration of 'history + healing' and 'acknowledging + dismantling power constructs' is crucial in every step of the problem-solving process. Tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all are designed with the community, including youth. ECCD is different from traditional design processes focusing on four pillars to create the hexagon-shaped framework above.

- *Equity:* When using ECCD, grantees include communities as living experts in all phases of the grantmaking process. Community members are included in assessing their needs, ideating on all suggestions, prototyping feasible, sustainable and desirable ideas, and learning and testing proposed designs. Voices are valued equitably as community members decide on the scenario that best supports their goals.

- *Humility-building:* In the humility-building process, recognizing the influence of our bias and perspective when attempting to understand another's emotions, thoughts, experiences and actions are pivotal. Using the ECCD framework (above) within the Infusing Equity into Built Environment for Better Health funding opportunity makes space for building humility and empathy continuously as co-creators share ideas and space in the name of enriching their community through the funding opportunity.

- *Integrating History and Healing Practices:* The history of the community and its possible need to heal from past traumas within the community purposely slows down the grantmaking process. The ECCD process requires co-creators to reflect on past products, policies and programs (known as scenarios in ECCD) that negatively impacted community members of multiple generations. Making space for healing and recognizing what had been previously experienced by the community creates an empathetic space where lasting change can be made. Here is information that may be helpful in understanding the history of health inequity in the state of Colorado.

- *Addressing Power Dynamics:* Using ECCD, individual or small group power is disseminated between all co-creators, including youth. As a part of the design process, grantees would name individuals or groups within the organization who hold the power to make decisions for the entire group. Then, traditional power hierarchies are eliminated in favor of distributing power equitably to all within the group.

ECCD allows for ideation, prototyping and feedback processes that must be thoughtful. In addition, the process minimizes the built environment being unusable or obsolete by the community in a short period of time because a swath of individuals must be a part of the design from start to finish.

## Who Benefits From Using This Toolkit?

This framework can be used by local governments and by nonprofit organizations or community groups working to facilitate community participation in the designing of solutions to physical health and health education projects.

Why use the term "redesign" versus "design" throughout this toolkit? As Antionette Carroll,

executive director of Creative Reaction Lab, has been quoted saying, "Systems of oppression, inequality and inequity are by design. Therefore, they can be redesigned." The area your group will be redesigning is not a clean slate. The land has a history. So do the people who are coming together. All of these factors are important. There is no such thing as a clean slate.

# Equity-centered Community Design in the Built Environment Redesign Process

When gathering the community for equity-centered design thinking work, here are some things that should be considered.

### Meeting Space

Where will you be meeting? Is the space accessible for various abilities? Is there space for child care?

### Compensating the Community

When we think about inviting living experts to discuss the needs of the community, there should not be an assumption that they will be willing to do the work for free. Is there a plan to compensate the community, including youth, for their input? If so, what does reciprocity mean to them? If not, why is compensation not being considered?

### Child Care

As discussed in the meeting space portion, child care should strongly be considered. When we ask the community to meet, it should not be without consideration of child care. Who will watch the children? Will these people be compensated? Are these people certified in CPR?

### Food

Just as meeting spaces and child care help ease the strain on the people that we invite, having snacks/meals during meetings is just as important. Who will be responsible for picking up food? Who is responsible for cleaning up afterward and setting up beforehand? Will there be community input on what foods should and should not be served?

### Meeting Times

The days and times in which meetings are held should always be considered. Do day meetings work for older members but not for youth? Should weekend meetings be considered? Does every person who is a part of the design process need to attend every meeting?

### Supplies

In the design process, sticky notes, poster paper/whiteboards and markers are common materials. What other items would be necessary so that everyone invited to participate feels that they belong? Will materials be translated into other languages beyond English?

*Accessibility*

It is important to think about accessibility as you convene your community. Consider spaces that are accessible for those that may be experiencing physical/developmental disability or those that may need translation support. What spaces are available in our communities that provide opportunities for wide participation? Do we need to translate/communicate materials into other languages? Do we have access to bilingual members of the community that can support translation in real time?

# Beliefs About Facilitating With Community

Here are some beliefs created by Equity Meets Design that we want you to consider as you begin to facilitate redesign conversations!

- **Don't try to be somebody else; be yourself.** White supremacy culture teaches us that standardization and adoption of "best practice" are necessary for success. Being the best facilitator means being yourself and showing up in your full humanity.

- **Live equitably to facilitate equitably.** You cannot turn on an equity stance while facilitating and then turn it off when the facilitation ends. Facilitators must live and breathe equity in their work and in their life to guide the learning and growth of others. Living equitably means honoring the full humanity of ourselves and others, continuously reflecting on and shifting internalized oppressive beliefs and behaviors, challenging racism, and aligning our words to our actions.

- **Embrace your humanity.** Challenge perfectionism and embrace a learner's stance. Honoring your humanity looks like challenging negative self-talk and creating space for self-compassion. We will make mistakes as facilitators, and we need to examine those mistakes critically: Do we have a bias that needs unpacking? Who was harmed by our actions? How do we repair the harm induced by our actions? Making mistakes as facilitators is a part of our journey and do not minimize our worthiness or belonging.

- **Know and leverage the strengths of your team members.** Even if you are facilitating the space alone, you are never alone! It is essential to know the strengths of your colleagues and call on them when needed.

- **Shift your understanding of time and success.** We live in a culture that rewards a false sense of urgency. This false sense of urgency makes it difficult to be inclusive and attentive to oppressive dynamics. Success doesn't mean getting through the plan or checking off all the boxes on the list. Instead, success looks like creating inclusive, anti-racist environments. Prioritize equity, inclusivity and process over time and product.

- **Start with a strong foundation.** Establishing a solid relationship with the co-creators/community is critical for successful facilitation. Through the relationship-building

process, the community understands who you are, why you are there, and how the group will approach the sessions. You also learn in the process.

## Let's Talk About Silence

When facilitating a group, you may experience silence after asking a question or during an activity. What are some emotions that you feel when people are silent? What response do you default to when this happens? Do you rephrase the question, give enough wait time, make assumptions about the group? Try to figure out what silence means. Could the group be confused? Are they still thinking about what you've just said because it is a new concept to them? Are they too afraid or shy to speak up? What types of activities can you do to strengthen the relationships in the room so that a culture of belonging is created where they want to share? Lastly, the more you facilitate groups, the easier it will be to be at ease with silence!

## Language Setting

When people come together for a common purpose, it is always essential to agree on the terms that will be used often in the space. For example, one person's definition of family may differ from someone else's definition. This can also be said about words like power, belonging and community. Think deeply about how your group will define and redefine terms as you start and move through the equity-centered design thinking process. Here is a shortlist of definitions that your group may find useful as you begin the redesign process.

## Consent with Storytelling

The request for someone to share their personal stories should be in the same proportion as the person's relationship with others in that space. In other words, the more the people in the space know and understand each other, the more we can feel comfortable asking them to share personal stories about their experiences if they wish. Sometimes when we ask someone to share their experiences, they can feel pressure or a need for compliance. Be on the lookout for this in your group! The goal is always consent!
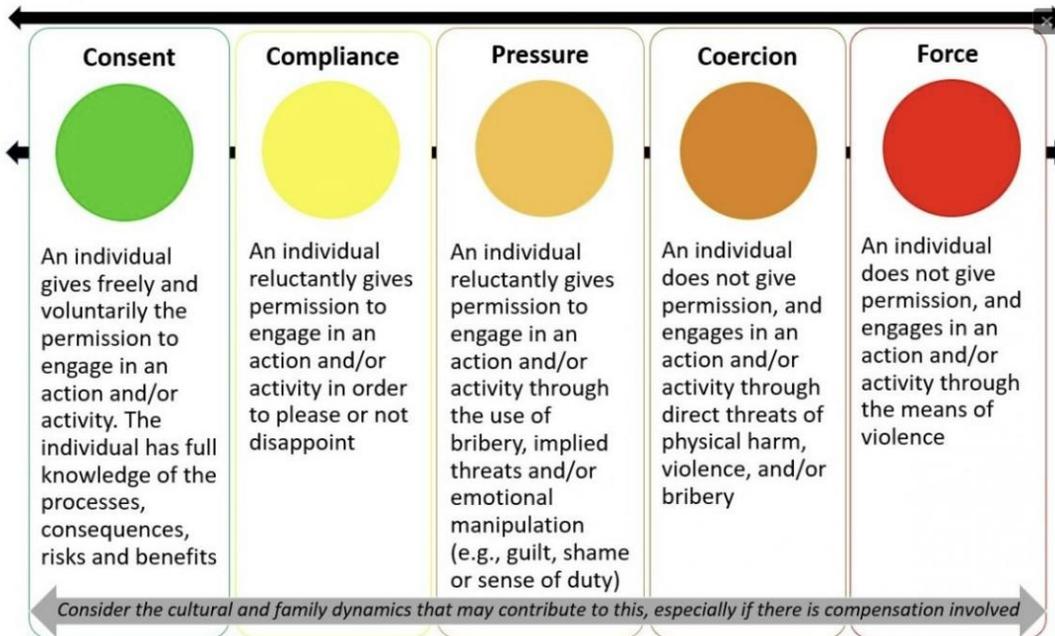
Figure 1: The Consent Continuum. Image supplied by RDI Network 2020

## Instead of Norms, Consider…

Norms are often created to control the space where they are created. Often facilitators create norms for fear of something happening in the space that would be undesirable. For example, a common norm is "stay engaged." The norm is saying that it's essential for participants to pay attention. Instead of creating a norm asking people to participate, create energy in the space that elicits engagement so participants want to stay engaged.

Here are some values from Arrien, A. (2001) "The Way of the Teacher: Principles of Deep Engagement."
- We acknowledge one another as equals.
- We try to stay curious about each other.
- We recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners.
- We slow down so we have time to think and reflect.
- We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together.
- We expect it to get messy at times.

The values focus on relationships versus control.

## Consensus Building Instead of Voting

As a part of the Equity-centered Community Design work that your redesign group will be engaging in, there will be times when decisions have to be made. Instead of voting on ideas, The Colorado Health Foundation asks that your redesign group use consensus. With consensus, power hierarchies are lessened, everyone's voice has to be heard to move forward, and the iteration process is expected. Here is a three-minute YouTube video on the benefits of consensus and the basics of how it works. Here is a quick guide on consensus as an inclusive decision-making process. Here is a more detailed guide explaining the step-by-step process.

# Let's Get Started

This toolkit is meant to help you move through the ECCD thinking process. This is not a linear process. It takes time and a willingness to be uncomfortable with some parts of the process. That being said, your redesign group will start with thinking about which stakeholders (diverse co-creators) are needed in space.

As a new group, you will begin to build humility and empathy for and with each other as well as others in the community in regards to the built environment the group will be redesigning. Although the original redesign group may have ideas regarding what the built environment should consist of, the "Defining and Assessing Topic/Community Needs" process will allow the new redesign group filled with diverse co-creators to truly define the problem that should be addressed within the built environment space.

Once the community's needs for the built environment are defined, the brainstorming begins! Ideating approaches give permission for all ideas to be put on the table. The activities in this toolkit will support the redesign group to start broad with its ideas and move to more defined ideas that can be discussed more in the rapid prototyping phase. Finally, in the testing phase, submission of the redesign group funding application should be submitted to The Colorado Health Foundation. Once built, the redesign process is not over. Feedback from the redesign group and the community is necessary. The toolkit includes a simple survey that can be used to collect data from community members who use the newly redesigned built environment.

# Inviting Diverse Co-creators

Inviting people into the redesign process is the most important step in the Equity-centered Community Design process. The invitation and constant nurturing of the relationships within the forming redesign group is what makes it different from traditional design work. Often called stakeholders or in some spaces, customers, co-creators are the living experts who use or will be using the built environment. The hope is that those who are invited to join the group will be able to attend a majority of the redesign meetings. The goal is not to simply ask for their opinion in a survey or focus group but bring them on board for the entire process. Here are some tips provided by Creative Reaction Lab to support this process:

- When inviting diverse co-creators, you need:
    - To build trust
    - Authenticity
    - Diversity, inclusion, equality and equity
    - Advocates for the work ahead
- Acknowledge, understand and utilize the strengths and the nature of the expertise of each stakeholder.

- Continuously address historical and current barriers that prevent co-creators from wanting to share their voice.
- Make space and time for healing between co-creators. Rushing through this part will jeopardize future steps in the redesign process.

Activity: Inviting Diverse Co-creators - Stakeholder Mapping & Inviting Living Experts

Activity: Inviting Diverse Co-creators - The Redesign Team

Activity: Inviting Diverse Co-creators - All That Power (Analysis)

# Building Humility and Empathy

Humility and empathy are the undercurrents that create the culture of belonging your new redesign group will need to move successfully with the built environment project. It is important that all who are involved acknowledge their assumptions and biases. The suspension of judgment is also vital. The activities within this area will allow the redesign group to not only practice humility and empathy-building with each other but with those in the community who are not a part of the redesign group. This will help the group create a built environment based on what the group knows the community needs versus making assumptions. As you move through these activities, consider the following tips from Creative Reaction Lab:

- Lean into discomfort. Recognize the gaps in your knowledge and challenge your assumptions.
- Be observant.
- Be open to new ideas and perspectives.
- Actively listen to the perspectives of others. Try to understand what life experiences led to their current worldview.
- Name the systems of power, privilege and oppression that have impacted, and continue to impact, the life experiences of yourself and of those in the redesign group.
- You don't have to share someone else's opinion in order to understand or acknowledge it.

Activity: Inviting Diverse Co-creators - On-Site Observations

Activity: Defining and Assessing Topic/Community Needs- Experience Diagramming

# Defining and Assessing Topic/Community Needs

Before starting the work of brainstorming and prototyping, it is important to make sure that what the redesign group named as the problem at the beginning of the redesign process is actually a problem that can be solved with the built environment. Below are several strategies that the group can use to ensure what you have named is actually the problem that you are trying to

solve. These activities will also support the group in becoming familiar with the "why" behind the problem statement that you will create.

Activity: Defining and Assessing Topic/Community Needs - The 5 "Why's" and 5 "How's"

## Ideating Approaches (Brainstorming)

"Brainstorming, ironically, is a structured way of breaking out of structure. It takes practice."

***At this point of the redesign process, your group will need the support of a landscape architect contracted through The Colorado Health Foundation to help the group decide what ideas are financially feasible. If you have not been in contact with the technical assistance team about architecture support, contact your program officer.***

The activities move from very broad idea gathering to more narrowly focused. This approach will help your redesign group methodically move from many ideas and features to one or two iterations that are feasible, sustainable and desirable for all stakeholders.

As you move through these activities, consider the following tips from Creative Reaction Lab:
- Be confident and create ideas that challenge the status quo, whether big or small.
- Generate as many ideas as possible without thinking about limitations or constraints. Remember, it is easier to refine after developing a large number of ideas as opposed to building up from a small amount.
- Avoid overthinking by writing or drawing your ideas quickly.
- Don't be afraid of failure, as every design or redesign started with numerous failures.

Activity: Ideating Approaches (Brainstorming) - Creative Matrix

Activity: Ideating Approaches (Brainstorming) - Buy a Feature

## Rapid Prototyping

In this portion of the design process, the group moves ideas brought forward in the ideation space to be created with drawings and 3D modeling (think clay, cardboard, glue sticks, coloring materials and paper)! You may find as you work in this area that the group will need to back up to the "Ideating Approaches" space again. That is completely normal. Several rounds of brainstorming and prototyping may be necessary. As discussed at the beginning of this toolkit, true equity-centered design can be a slow but rewarding process. Stick with it until the end! As you move through these activities, consider the following tips from Creative Reaction Lab:
- Do not invest much time, energy or resources in creating the prototyped, built environment.
- Build the prototype with everyday materials, such as paper, Popsicle sticks, glue, string, etc.

- Prototyping is meant to be a quick and iterative process. The goal is not perfection. The purpose is to test out assumptions of the group's ideas, making mistakes early so that you can correct those assumptions before investing more time and resources in making your idea a reality.
- Prototype small to eventually build big.

Activity: Rapid Prototyping - Prototype Model

# Testing and Learning

In this final step of the Equity-centered Community Design Process, the redesign group has the opportunity to receive feedback from the community they represent. Next, the redesign group is ready to apply for funding for the built environment project. Because the Equity-centered Community Design process is ongoing, after the space is completed, continued feedback is solicited from built environment users.

The first activity in this area is meant to be completed before applying for funding. After the build is complete, continue "Testing and Learning" by completing the last two activities.

Activity: Testing and Learning - On-the-Ground Critiques (Prototype Fair)

Activity: Testing and Learning - On-site Observation

Activity: Testing and Learning - Critique

# Closing

We encourage you to reach out should you have questions about the ECCD process or if you and your community are in need of consultative support. Feel free to contact your program officer or Senior Program Officer Collinus Newsome at cnewsome@coloradohealth.org at your convenience.