

Participatory Process

Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) and other peer programs are more productive as a recovery community and more supportive as a recovery space when they strive to meet folks where they're at. Begin by creating an environment where participation is natural, enthusiastic, non-threatening — a culture where social roles within a community begin to emerge. These valued social roles are crucial for challenging the ways that many folks in recovery have previously been pushed to the borders or margins of society and named as less important. Gaining a valued social role in a recovery space is an important way to begin reversing social rejection and bringing those valued roles back into the larger community. Below are some key characteristics of a participatory process.

Key Characteristics:

Self-Reflection

Participatory work requires self reflection. You might ask, “Am I doing this out of self interest?” or “Do I truly believe the community will benefit from this decision?”

Trust

It requires trust in oneself and others. This type of trust takes both safety and time to develop.

Respect

Peers are respected as experts in their own lives and learn from others who share similar experiences

Determination

It is messy. There are no shortcuts or recipes for guaranteed success. Keep working at it!

Continuous Improvement

We continue to engage in the questions. When we live in the questions and re-evaluate our systems, practices, and processes on a regular basis, the process stays fresh and continues to grow.

Empowerment

As the process unfolds, individuals become empowered and move toward ownership

Participatory Process

Embracing an atmosphere where staff and peers collaboratively identify different phases of programming and where, when, and how peers can be involved is central to the participatory process. Part of understanding the participatory process requires staff and peers to take an honest look, or “inventory,” of how well they are doing with implementing a truly participatory process. Equally as important is the idea of creating a culture where peer participants feel safe and confident in voicing their thoughts, concerns and opinions and acting on their skills and talents, not necessarily in response to staff, but as a starting place.

Guiding

Participatory Question:

When and how are peers being involved?

Participatory Process Checklist

- Involves peers in all aspects of program design, planning, and implementation
- Peer leadership advisory board that informs programming, policies, procedures, and goals
- Diverse avenues to solicit peer and community input and engagement including: town meetings, focus groups, surveys, and listening forums
- Established practice assigning appropriate tasks to peers
- Peers and community members gather to debrief any major activity/event
- Peers conduct outreach and community engagement activities
- Collaborative atmosphere, with an emphasis on “bottom up” decision making
- Formal process and protocol exists to obtain input, ideas, and feedback from staff, peers, community members, and stakeholders
- Actively seeks, invites, and utilizes input and participation from diverse groups and communities, including multiple pathways of recovery
- Peer input is sought in other organizational decisions, such as strategic planning, grant applications, hiring, appointments, and program funding
- Opportunities are provided for peers to develop and demonstrate leadership skills in program activities