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Health Equity Community of Practice Finding Solidarity in Rural Spaces

Kennedi Fields, Klamath County Public Health Caitlin Nemeth, Yamhill County Public Health





HOW DID WE START?

The Identified Needs

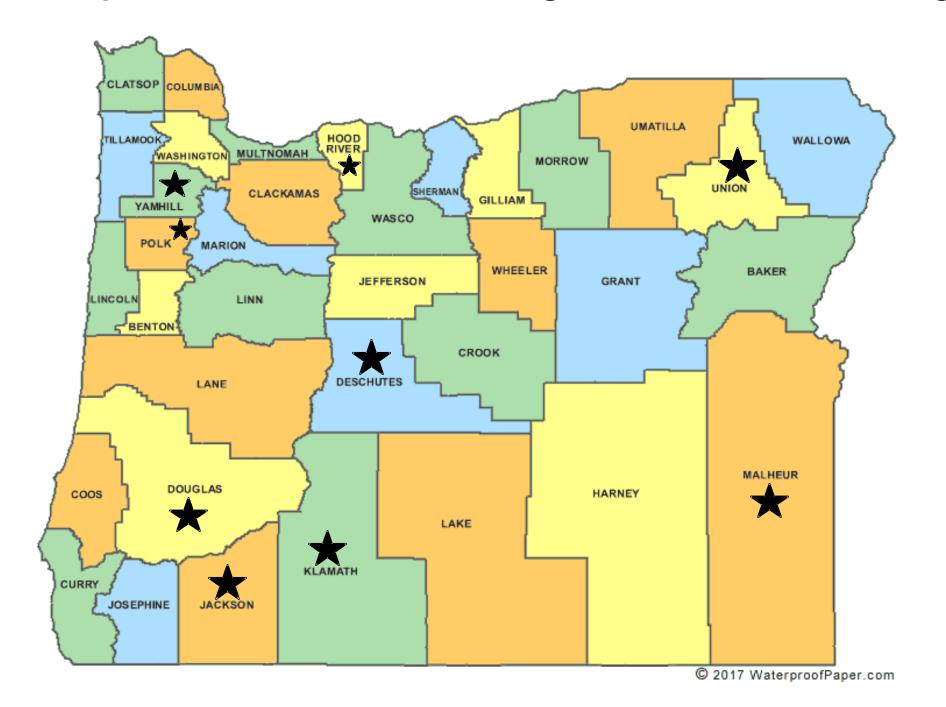
- Dealing with feeling isolated in the work at any levels like individually, locally, regionally, and nationally
- Small population and workforce creates challenges in prioritizing equity due to competing priorities
- Recognizing unique challenges of promoting equity in rural communities (e.g.: unsupportive leadership, politicization of terms, sparse resources, etc.)



Solution
Create a supportive
space that addresses
challenges and facilitates
growth by bringing
together equity
practitioners at the
government level.

Health Equity Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together fulfill their goals.



Who We Are

 County government employees driven to improve health equity in our communities

Community

Domain

Practice

CoP

Represent 9 Oregon counties

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General Benefits of CoPs

Connection

 People who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact frequently or at all

New people always welcome

As capacity allows –
no pressure or
requirements

 Lack of structure leads to adaptable meetings



- Sharing what worked and what didn't with others
- Increases collaboration
- Information exchange
- Resource sharing
- Rapid problemsolving
- Innovative brainstorming

Rural Health Equity CoP Feedback on Benefits

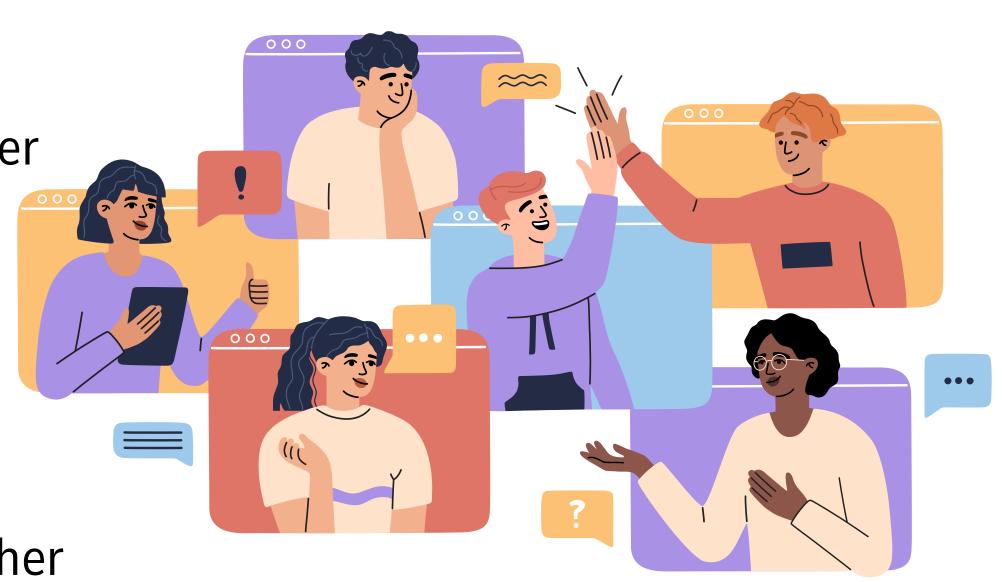
 Smaller, more specific groups help establish common ground

 Siloed positions coming together reduces feelings of isolation

• Being in community is healing

 Guides for other organizations that have never had a health equity person

 Lack of work product leads to focusing on supporting each other



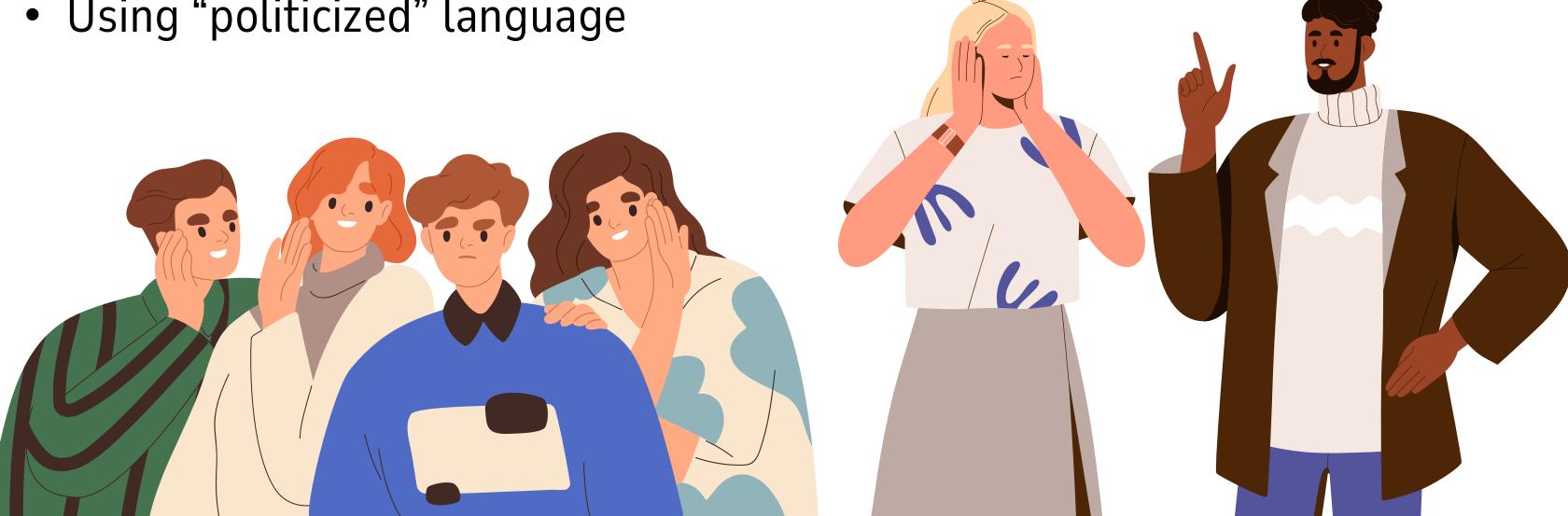
General Challenges of CoPs

Organizational Hierarchy

- Leadership "support"
- Shifting priorities
- Resisting change
- Measuring impact
- Using "politicized" language

Sustainable Engagement

- Lack of agenda and structure
- Lack of shared understanding
- Lack of time and capacity



Rural Health Equity CoP Feedback on Challenges

- Establishing common ground repeatedly
- Rural is not one-size-fits-all
- Different decision makers and power structures
- Lack of power
- Rural-specific groups often lead to same people showing up
- Overburdened and overwhelmed staff
- Daily struggle of navigating a changing world
- Conflict with what words to use



A New Way to Talk About the Social Determinants of Health

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

"Health starts where we live, learn, work and play."

"We had to talk about the topic in a way that people could understand, that was meaningful, and that didn't align the topic with any existing political perspective or agenda."

Figuring out how to say something simply can be a complicated process.

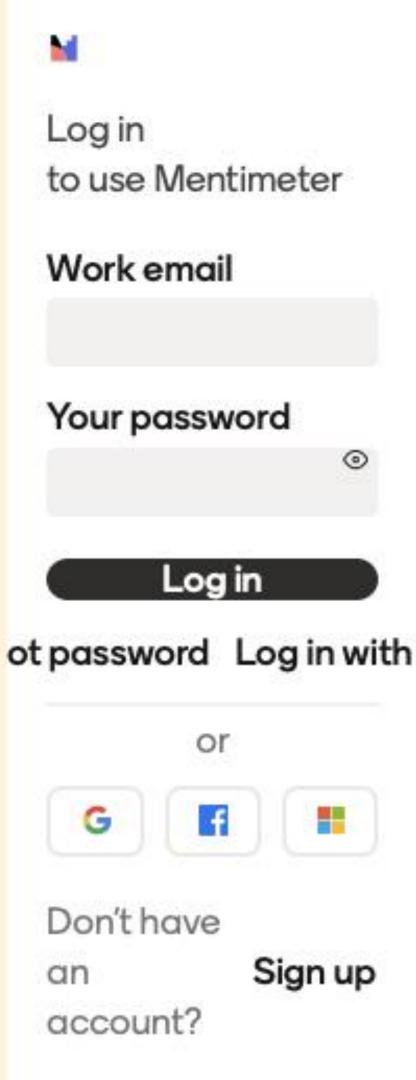
- Each of us has developed our own set of beliefs and values.
- As we listen and learn new concepts, we try to fit what we hear into these existing frames, which means that even the most seemingly innocuous terms can be laden with meaning.



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Yamhill County - Challenges & Successes

Main strategy: partnering with community-based orgs to work together

	Challenges	Successes
•	Low levels of visible support Misunderstanding concepts Lack of power in decision making Siloed divisions, agencies, and jurisdictions Poor retention rates Survey hesitancy	 Health equity narrative Equity action workgroup External coalitions Presentation connected EDI to trauma-informed care Internal EDI committee EDI sections within internal newsletters

A MODEL FOR BOLD AND INCLUSIVE CONVERSATIONS

Taken from Mary-Frances Winters' We Can't Talk About That At Work!

1. FOCUS ON SELF- AND OTHER UNDERSTANDING:

Explore the role of identity, cultural competence, biases, and fear

2. ASSESS READINESS:

Engage in 4 Es:
Exposure, Experience,
Education, & Empathy
Gauge individual and
organizational readiness

3. PREPARE FOR THE CONVERSATION:

Identify the why, who, what, how, where, and when

4. CREATE SHARED MEANING:

Establish common ground based on facts and data

Reflect & Learn

5. DELVE DEEP INTO DIFFERENCES:

Acknowledge polarization Engage in reciprocal learning

6. INTERPRET AND BRIDGE:

Sharpen inclusive habits

Reflect & Learn

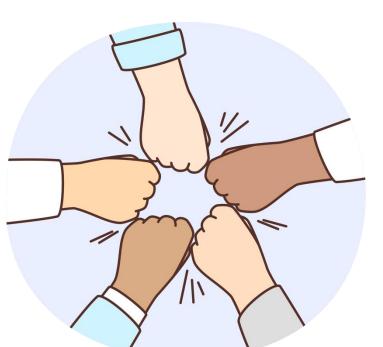
Klamath County - Successes

2022-2025 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) created a priority area group specifically for health equity.

- Hosted the 1st and 2nd annual Klamath County Health Equity Summit
- Developed monthly community health equity book club
- Held several community education events and trainings

Klamath County Public Health

- Hired a full-time health equity staff member
- Developed a Health Equity Budget Tool and Health Equity Policy Tool
- Consistent staff training on health equity and related topics
- Expansion of accessibility devices
- Monthly newsletters on holidays, cultural events, and awareness months
- Coordination of the Hispanic Health Committee (2021-2023)
- Driver and fiscal sponsor for the development of Spanish radio station and companion website





Klamath County - Challenges

- Conflict on use of "politicized" language
- Staff reluctance to engage with training materials
- Dismissal of Klamath Falls City Health Equity Committee

 Limited workforce capacity to progress equity initiatives (internally and within the community)



Equity committee to be formed in Klamath Falls



FEATURED TOP STORY

City ends equity task force

By Joe Siess H&N Staff Reporter Sep 15, 2021 💂



► Start Menti

I would love to have a space like that – how can I do it?

1 2 3's of CoPs:

- 1 Identifying challenges and opportunities (Rose, Bud, Thorn Activity)
- 2 Recruiting members
- 3 Learning and sharing within the CoP
- 4 Implementing changes in practice
- 5 Reflecting, evaluating, and sharing results



EVEN IF THE "RULES" CHANGE, OUR VALUES DON'T.



WHAT IS ONE ACTION YOU'RE GOING TO TAKE MOVING FORWARD TO ADVANCE EQUITY IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?

RESOURCES

- A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health guide
- Local health department assessment
- Advancing Health Equity in Local Health Departments guide
- We Can't Talk About That At Work! by Mary-Frances Winters

VIRTUAL SPACES

- National Association for City & County Health Officials (NACCHO) virtual communities
- GARE Online Community webpage





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Thank you!

Caitlin Nemeth
Yamhill County Public Health
nemethc@yamhillcounty.gov

Kennedi Fields
Klamath County Public Health
kfields@klamathcounty.org



Thank you to the 2025 Forum partners!



















































