



Community Engagement: Using Feedback Loops to Empower Residents and Influence Systemic Change in Culturally Diverse Communities

Karen T. Jackson, Sylvia Burgess, Forrest Toms, and Ernest L. Cuthbertson

Keywords: community engagement, data, decision-making, empowerment, evaluation, feedback loop, neighborhood revitalization, organizational change

Author Biographies: *Karen T. Jackson*, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in Leadership Studies at North Carolina A&T State University. Dr. Jackson teaches online and face-to-face graduate quantitative research methods course and research design courses. She is also an evaluator and is Principal Consultant with Katalyst Innovative Consulting Services. Her research is grounded in systems theory, policy studies, organizational theory, understanding of community engagement, equity, and social justice. Helping leaders understand how these systems and policies can create pathways and barriers especially for under-represented groups and people from low socio-economic backgrounds is a goal of Dr. Jackson's research. Dr. Jackson is a published author in the areas of student success and organizational culture in community colleges, biased policing, and various topics related to leadership and teaching in secondary education. She has a B.S. in Chemistry and M.Ed. in Mathematics and Curriculum and Instruction from The University of Southern Mississippi and a Ph.D. in Educational Research and Policy Analysis from North Carolina State University. *Sylvia W. Burgess*, Ph.D. is the Vice-President of Operations and Senior Partner with One Step at a Time Consulting Services for leadership training and development. Dr. Burgess is a facilitator of team training and professional development for team building through classroom and simulation activities, strategy, and self-improvement subject matters. She has over 18 years of experience in teaching, facilitation, development and curriculum design in leadership development, diversity and cultural competency, community engagement, team building and conflict resolution. Dr. Burgess is a published author in the areas of spiritual capital and community engagement. She received BA in Speech and Language Pathology and MPA from University of North Carolina Greensboro. She earned a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies from North Carolina A & T State University. She has proven leadership and senior management experience in business, operational management, and training and with the Center for Creative Leadership. Dr. Burgess has served as an adjunct professor at North Carolina A&T State University in the Leadership Studies doctoral program. Dr. Burgess is an active member in the community serving in several service roles. *Forrest D. Toms*, Ph.D. is Interim Executive Director of the North Carolina NAACP. His current research is in the areas of leadership development with faith-based/community leaders around spiritual capital and civic engagement. Dr. Toms is also a Senior Partner with One Step at a Time Consulting. Toms is recognized nationally for his systems approach and processes related to diversity and cultural competency in the education, health and mental health fields. He has published

articles, produced books and multimedia training products in the areas of diversity, cultural competency and community engagement. Dr. Toms received his BS and MA degrees in Psychology from Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; and a PhD in Developmental Psychology from Howard University, Washington, DC. He resides in Hickory, NC with his wife Phyllis, son, Forrest II and daughter, Zakiya. *Ernest L. Cuthbertson*, Ph.D. is a 28-year veteran of law enforcement. He applies the skills of investigation, data collection, and community analysis gained through his experience in law enforcement, criminal justice, and political science to the research and evaluations he performs. Cuthbertson is the founder and Executive Director of a non-profit program, Racing 4 Our Future, Incorporated. The primary focus of the program is impacting at-risk youth. He lectures on Gangs, Youth Violence, School Violence, Trends and various youth programs dealing with youth at risk. He is recognized nationally and internationally in the area of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), Safe School Planning and Street Gang Awareness. He was directly responsible for gathering, analyzing, and assisting the FBI and members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force with dignitary protection for city visits and dissemination of criminal intelligence. Cuthbertson holds a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration and Policy from Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He is a graduate of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University with a B. A. in Political Science and Guilford Technical Community College with an Associates in Applied Science of Criminal Justice. He completes his Ph.D. in Leadership Studies at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in December 2018.

Recommended Citation: Jackson, K. T., Burgess, S., Toms, F., & Cuthbertson, E. L. (2018). Community Engagement: Using Feedback Loops to Empower Residents and Influence Systemic Change in Culturally Diverse Communities. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 9(2), 1-21. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (<http://www.gjcpp.org>)

Community Engagement: Using Feedback Loops to Empower Residents and Influence Systemic Change in Culturally Diverse Communities

Abstract

A multi-faceted approach to community engagement includes the need to involve the community members in the design, implementation and feedback of any program, services, or supports provided. Intentional participatory engagement of residents also requires shared responsibility for workload, shared recognition of achievement, thoughtful communication, engagement in robust discussions taking care not to internalize conversations as personal affronts and holding close the rules of effective decision making (Toms & Burgess, 2014). Implementing a feedback loop process can be used as a tool to foster intentional resident engagement. The findings presented in this article are from a case study of a neighborhood that implemented a feedback loop process. Analysis of data indicate that while transportation, housing, and places for people to safely be outside are real community concerns, acts of nature and choices made by city government also directly impact the quality of life of the residents in this community. The need for purposeful channels of communication to be established among residents, between neighborhood action groups, and city government is evident. Leveraging relationships with community partners to establish trust and organizational understanding of culture within community socio-economic context, along with the multiple layers of community engagement is discussed.

Introduction

Building capacity for change in communities requires a multi-faceted approach to community engagement (Toms & Burgess, 2014). We know that meeting the needs of families and concerned citizens involves preparation by individuals and organizations within neighborhoods. There are multiple research-based inquiry processes that can be used to assist concerned citizens to lead in their communities. These processes can be used in communities to organize, plan, develop, and implement programs to improve the quality of life. The feedback loop process is one approach used to engage residents in solving community problems. The goals of the feedback loop process include:

- Intentional and consistent participation in community meetings

and forums to provide input from the point of view of community residents.

- Making space for residents to identify their own needs.
- Establishing strategies to meet residents expressed needs.
- Garnering the support and resources to implement the necessary strategies.

At the core of the FBL process are the tenets of humble listening and co-creation of events and activities. Neighborhood partners can also enhance revitalization activities, programs, or strategies by continuously integrating a feedback loop process, to listen to community residents' input and co-creating changes that will enhance their overall quality of life.

Habitat for Humanity partners with people in communities in the U.S. and around the world to help them build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat's work with homeowners has shown that individuals and families thrive when they have a safe and stable home in a safe and stable community. Through its Neighborhood Revitalization efforts, Habitat takes a holistic approach to expand the organization's core mission of building safe, decent and affordable homes in partnership with families at the community level. Neighborhood Revitalization empowers families to build up their own communities, so neighbors can thrive and enhance their quality of life together. Local Habitat for Humanity organizations work in coalition with neighborhood residents and partners to address the many elements that contribute to a higher quality of life, including health care, safety and economic development, in addition to housing.

The Multifaceted Approach to Community Engagement takes on various forms. It goes beyond the general annual planning of programs and services and intentionally creates an environment that is conducive to building trust, respect and shared power within a community. It includes the need for community members to engage in the design, implementation and feedback of any programs, services, or supports provided within the community. Since neighborhood revitalization is challenging in communities where unemployment rates are high, property values are low, and human safety is of constant concern Habitat's Neighborhood Revitalization program began efforts to systematically engage and document resident voice in these types of communities. The mechanism for engaging residents and documenting resident voice was the pilot of a feedback loop (FBL) process in 12 neighborhoods. These 12 neighborhoods applied for and received funding from Habitat to implement the FBL process. The feedback loop implementation was led at the Habitat

national level by Organizational Development Consultant, whose role was to communicate with and train the leaders at the local affiliate Neighborhood Revitalization offices how to implement the FBL process. The local affiliate leaders in turn recruited resident leaders in their respective communities to train and lead the FBL process in their own communities.

The intent of this study is to share the experiences of the members of one community that participated in the feedback loop pilot. This study also uses the lens of the multi-faceted approach to community engagement to discuss the community member experiences in the feedback loop process.

Feedback Loops

The Feedback Loop (FBL) process is a method of engaging residents in facilitating community conversations. During the FBL process data is collected from residents to make decisions about neighborhood concerns. Neighborhood Revitalization staff work with residents to make decisions on how to address the concerns and equip residents to design a plan to address the concerns. implementation of the designed plan includes hearing from residents continuously and making changes as needed based on the vocalized needs of the residents. During the community conversations, real-time feedback is provided by community residents on 3-5 action-oriented questions. The feedback is then used to spark a conversation with community residents about their aspirations or concerns. Based on the dialogue, the community works together to co-create changes in their community that address their aspirations or concerns. This process, equips residents to design and implement a plan that addresses neighborhood aspirations or concerns, while hearing from residents continuously and

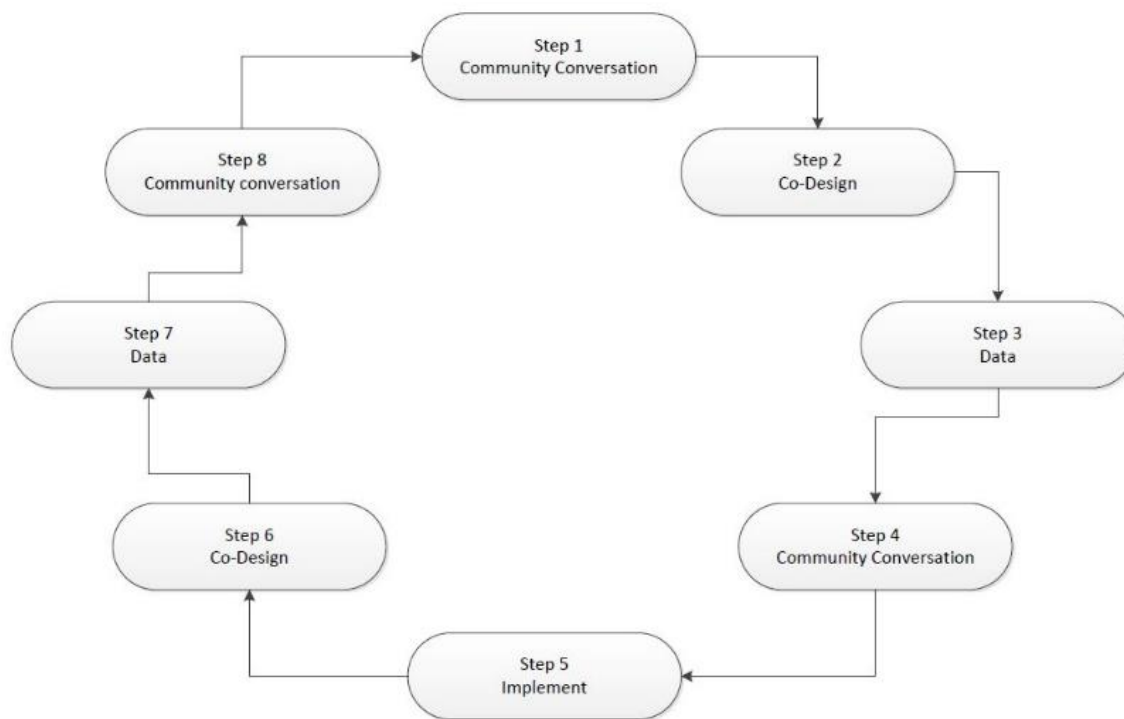
making changes as needed based on the vocalized needs of the residents.

The feedback loop process that the 12 pilot neighborhoods learned and implemented in partnership with their communities included five steps: co-design a survey, collect resident

feedback using the co-designed survey, analyze the feedback, dialogue about the feedback, and course correct as needed using the collective feedback. However, after engaging in the FBL process pilot the eight-step shown in Figure 1 emerged.

Figure 1

8 Step Feedback Loop Process



Description of each phase

Step 1. Community Conversation #1 – The ultimate purpose of a community conversation is to identify and determine neighborhood priorities. For success to be realized in this step, it is important to gather honest input that represents the diversity of residents.

Step 2: Co-design data collection – Co-design appropriate questions with residents to

ensure valuable data is gathered. Ensure collective agreement that those questions are the right questions.

Step 3: Data collection – Collect feedback by determining which method of data collection would work best for the community.

Step 4: Community Conversation #2 – This community conversation occurs to determine consensus on what action is appropriate. Ensure that residents feel that the analysis

shared is accurate and representational. Come to agreement on the best path forward.

Step 5: Implement – During this step, modifications are made to programs or strategies or projects are implemented. To ensure the community continues to be aware of progress:

- Keep the neighborhood updated on how the project is progressing (social media, flyers, communication bulletins/information stations, or postcards).
- Track successes and challenges with implementation.
- Take pictures, videos of process. Also interview folks and share interesting findings from interview at subsequent conversations when applicable.

Step 6: Co-design second data collection – Co-design appropriate questions with residents to assess progress based on the agreed upon modification.

Step 7: Data collection – Ensure the feedback collected is representative of the voice of the community. Accountability, transparency of residents' voice, and increased understanding of collective neighborhood priorities may be realized in this phase.

Step 8: Community Conversation #3 – Community conversation occurs to achieve consensus about if the action was appropriate. If it is realized that there is a need to make changes in the plan, changes are made to the plan as the plan that was developed is being deployed.

Empowering and Leveraging Residents Voice

Questioning assumptions, roles, and myths in a manner that is truth-seeking empowers people to think critically about their environment (Alinsky, 1962; Boykin &

Ellison, 1995; Chávez, et. al. 2007; Corneille, et. al., 2005). The cycles of understanding, listening, dialoguing, acting, reflecting, and correcting create space for residents to feel empowered to improve their own neighborhoods and their own lives. The FBL process helps residents to gain control, begin to understand how to access resources, and to better understand their physical and social environment. The FBL process is characteristic of empowerment, which is defined as:

“An intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect critical reflection, caring, and group participation through which people placing in equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources” (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989).

Neighborhoods determining the goals of and evaluating the effectiveness of their FBL process

Prior to implementing the FBL process, it is critical to meet with residents and talk about whether they want to engage in the process and what their expectations would be from engaging in the process. Development of FBL process goals can be accomplished by beginning with the end in mind. This can be accomplished by exploring and determining which of the following FBL process goals align with resident expectations:

- Is the goal of the FBL process to empower residents to use their own voices to advocate for neighborhood improvements?
- Is the goal of the FBL process to develop a collaborative process between Habitat staff and neighborhood residents to accomplish certain events and projects in the neighborhood?
- Is the goal of the FBL process to build upon existing community

<p>partnerships or build new community partnerships to establish and gain access to the resources needed to implement projects for neighborhood improvements?</p> <p>Engaging in dialogue with residents to assess whether the goals of the FBL process are being met and documenting and assessing</p>	<p>whether the goals are changing along the implementation process is another way to build relationship and establish trust with neighborhood residents. To monitor the level of integration of the FBL across the communities, local Habitat offices were asked to self-rate the effects of the FBL process using the rubric below.</p>
---	--

Table 1

Resident Self-Rating Feedback Loop Implementation Rubric

To what effect are feedback loops integrated into your neighborhoods?

Beginning to close the loop	Rarely are residents asked questions to encourage their feedback during community conversations
Developing the process to close the loop	<p>Conversations focus on a statement of correct or incorrect rather than deeper/meaningful exploration of ideas. Seldom are residents asked questions designed to encourage discussion on a few points during community conversations</p>
Progressing on closing the loop	<p>Conversations seldom build on residents' responses or encourages them to build on each other's responses. Occasionally, residents are asked questions to build on other responses, clarify comments, push for more elaborate answers, or engage in thinking about the conversations throughout community conversations</p>
Sustaining the process of closing the loop	<p>Feedback loops sustain the conversation. Occasionally, end with the partners indicating correct or incorrect responses, and allow for deeper/more meaningful exploration of some ideas. Frequently, residents are asked questions to build on other responses, clarify comments, push for more elaborate answers, or engage in thinking about the conversations multiple times throughout community conversation</p>
	<p>Extended feedback loops are used to support residents' elaboration and to have them contribute to extended conversations. They are characterized by consistent use of feedback/probes that encourage deeper/more meaningful discussion.</p>

Conceptual Framework

Endeavoring to bring about systemic and sustainable change in diverse social climates where differences in norms, beliefs, values, and linguistics exist can stimulate cultural conflict. Community engagement activities, programs, and initiatives that do not intentionally include residents of the community in the development and planning stages can lead to confusion, unrealistic expectations, and disengaged residents (Chappell, 2008). Some research suggests that when African Americans and white Americans meet without including in their agenda a discussion of the way they are interpreting one another's behavior, which is grounded in the assumptions about their expectations for the meeting, failed communication and unmet expectations result (Kochman, 1991; Toms & Hobbs, 1997). A community engagement approach that empowers residents to interact and communicate with individuals from different groups and to make decisions about the community engagement activities, can lead to higher levels of resident participation, clear interpretation of differences, relationship building, and community programming that residents perceive as meeting the needs of their community. A multifaceted approach to community engagement can foster resident empowerment which includes the following components (Toms & Toms, 2014):

- Intra-community capacity building meeting with key stakeholders
- Create forums for community input and for them to identify their own needs
- Establish strategy to communicate with community on a consistent basis
- Know how agencies operate and their key stakeholders
- Know the status of consumers and services needed and offered (collected data)
- Set times to consistently interact with

- agency stakeholders
- Establish a group to visit and discuss issues and concerns with provider agencies
- Identify community stakeholders who have the skills and time to be on committees, boards, and planning groups.

Capacity building for community engagement in communities where the majority of residents are people of color requires the addition of trust building and understanding of spiritual capital and social capital influences in intrapersonal relationships in the community. It is critically important that an environment is created that is conducive to trust building, inter-personal respect and a sharing of power. (Hood, 2004; Hopson & Hood, 2005; McBride, et. al., 2006; McCloskey, et. al., 2011; Toms & Burgess, 2014; Tyrone, 2016).

The multi-faceted approach incorporates the need to involve the community members in the design, implementation and feedback of any program, services and supports provided. Intentional participatory engagement of residents also requires shared responsibility for workload, shared recognition of achievement, thoughtful communication, engagement in robust discussions taking care not to internalize conversations as personal affronts and holding close the rules of effective decision making (Toms & Toms, 2014).

Methods

For this study we used a qualitative case study constructivist approach (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2002). We used purposeful and opportunistic sampling to collect the data and gain understanding of the FBL process implementation in a neighborhood in Southeastern United States. These sampling approaches allowed the researchers to be intentional about the

selection of participants to learn and understand the residents and staff involved with the implementation of the FBL process and to capitalize on events that were unfolding (Creswell, 2012).

Site Selection

The Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood is located Forrest County, City of Hattiesburg, which is in the Pine Belt region of Southeast Mississippi. This neighborhood was chosen for case study because of its unique history of difficult race relations, education and economic challenges as well as the challenges this region has had over the past several decades and recently with catastrophic natural disasters in the form of major hurricanes and tornadoes. Hattiesburg is a college town, home to The University of Southern Mississippi and William Carey University. The military installation, Camp Shelby, sits just south east of the Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood. During the Civil Rights era Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing was a community proud of its self-reliance and small black businesses despite a political climate where voter suppression was normal. During Freedom Summer 1964 Palmers Crossing was headquarters for civil rights activities in the 5th congressional district. It was the largest and most active site in the state with 90 volunteers and 3000 participants. One of seven Freedom Schools in the state was located in Palmers Crossing, three freedom libraries were set up, and a community center established during Freedom Summer.

Currently, many of the homes in the Irene Chapel/Palmer's Crossing neighborhood are legacy housing. Nearly 32% of residents live below the poverty level and the neighborhood has 214 vacant units. The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2011-2015 estimates the population density to be 552.62 persons per square mile, which

is greater than the national average population density of 89.61 persons per square mile. The neighborhood is 3.17 square miles and has a total population of 1,750. The neighborhood sits inside of Forrest County which is 466.04 square miles and has a total population of 76,267. The racial demographics of the neighborhood are 41.59% white, 56.74% black, 0.22% other, 1.45% multiple races. 51.01% female, 50.99% male. 98.79% of the 330 students living in this neighborhood qualify for free/reduced lunch. On time high school graduation rate for students in this neighborhood is 31.76% while the same statistic for students in all of Forrest County is 70.3%. Per capita income for this neighborhood is \$15,772.

Participants and Data Collection

The purpose of all interview questions and the intent of observations was to gain insight into the FBL process as it was implemented in the Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood. The methodology involved two primary phases of data collection involving rapid interviews, interviews before and after the site visit, and observations at the neighborhood meeting. The rapid interviews occurred at the Feedback Loop Summit held in Atlanta, GA at the Habitat for Humanity International headquarters office. The regular interviews occurred during a two-day site visit to the Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood (see interview questions in Appendix). The Neighborhood Revitalization Manager recruited the volunteers, board member, and principal for interviews. The researcher was allowed to recruit community residents during the neighborhood meeting that occurred during the site visit. Approximately 60 residents including parents and children flowed in and out of the room during the neighborhood meeting. Two residents, one black female and one Hispanic female volunteered to participate in the interview. Observations and field notes from the neighborhood meeting

were also included. Table 2 below provides a summary of the participants and the types of data collected.

Table 2

Research Methods and Data Sources

Phases	Methods	Source of Data
Phase I	Rapid Interviews	Neighborhood Representatives at Feedback Loop Summit – Atlanta, GA 1 Habitat Revitalization Manager
Phase II	Interview (during and post site visit)	3 Habitat for Humanity Volunteers 1 Habitat Board Member 2 Community Residents 1 Neighborhood Revitalization Manager (Hattiesburg Area Habitat Office) 1 Pre-K -6 Community School Principal
Neighborhood Meetings	Research Journal	Observations and field notes

Data Analysis

The purpose of coding interview data is to identify patterns and themes to eventually construct meaning resulting from the qualitative data. Coding is “the process of categorically marking or referencing units of text (e.g., words, sentences, paragraphs, and quotations) with codes and labels as a way to indicate patterns and meaning” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Documents were examined and coded to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of implementing the program. Interviews with subject matter experts involved asking the same questions of each interviewee. The interview transcripts were examined and coded for similarities and differences. Field notes from the observations made during the neighborhood meeting were examined and coded in order to explain the effects of these events. We used a qualitative constructivist approach to analyze the data in order to further explain and understand the FBL process implementation (Creswell, 2012;

Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2002).

Trustworthiness

Study participants were provided an opportunity to review this article prior to publication in order to validate the findings. The findings presented in this article represent the voice of the participants of this study. The findings demonstrate the study participants perspective of the FBL process implementation within the context of the community where the case study was conducted. The findings are not authored by Habitat for Humanity International. The authors of this article followed the traditional methods for analyzing data collected for a case study to present these findings.

Results

Rapid Interview

During the rapid interview the Neighborhood Revitalization manager shared what she

learned from the FBL process. She also provided the information gathered during the community conversations and the decisions that were made by the residents of the Palmer's Crossing/Irene Chapel community. During the course of the FBL process implementation, the number of residents engaged in community conversations rose from 13 to 82 between the first and second community conversation. After designing the data collection with residents, collecting data from residents, working with residents to analyze the data, and dialoguing with residents about the results of the data analysis the residents began to make choices about the projects they would engage in to improve their neighborhoods. Three community conversations were held. Findings from the FBL process implementation pilot demonstrate that with each community conversation resident attendance increased on average by 70% between the first and second community conversation. Dialogue between residents and between residents and Habitat staff became deeper and richer over the course of

each individual conversation and community conversation. Top resident concerns were activities for neighborhood youth and elderly and safety. Residents best liked neighbors, affordability of housing, schools, safety, access to healthcare. The list of items least liked by residents are reflected in the comments about projects they want to work on which include eight comments - recreation for youth and elderly, three comments each - safety, neighborhood upkeep, speed bumps, cheaper homes, road repairs, more community involvement, two comments each - access to grocery stores, more police presence, cookout facility, community events

Table 3 below shows projects chosen by the residents of the neighborhood and the percent of engaged residents voting for each project. The chosen projects are reflective of the concerns of neighborhood residents. 46% of neighborhood residents participated in voting for project one and 22% of neighborhood residents participated in voting for project two.

Table 3

Neighborhood Project Chosen – FBL Process Implementation

State	City, Neighborhood/# residents engaged in decision making*
MS	Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing (82)
Project 1 (% of engaged residents voting for project)	Fundraiser for youth (46%)
Project 2 (% of engaged residents voting for project)	Community event, neighborhood clean-up (22%)

*Number based on second community conversation

At the second community conversation residents used the self-rating rubric to determine where they felt they were in the process of implementing the FBL process.

They rated themselves as beginning to close the loop. Characteristics of beginning to close the loop are that residents are rarely asked questions to encourage their feedback during

community conversations and conversations focus on a statement of correct/incorrect rather than deeper, meaningful exploration of ideas (see the self-rating rubric).

Site visit interview and observation findings

The Community as Described by the Participants. Study participants provided background information about the Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood. This information provides context and describes a few of the challenging situations within which the FBL process was being implemented from the participants point of view. Neighborhood housing problems, choices made by city government, and the consequences of historical racial divisiveness present an environment where as one of the volunteers stated, residents have a “decimated sense of community”. Palmers Crossing was annexed 27 years ago, and their drainage problems still have not been addressed. In recent years commercial industry has worked with the city of Hattiesburg on annexing along Highway 49, one of the borders of the neighborhood. From the resident’s point of view this recent annexing appears to demonstrate that the city of Hattiesburg is more concerned about chasing the tax dollars than taking care of what they already own. Residents feel the city should take care of issues that have been neglected in their neighborhood before expanding.

Legacy housing and residents desire to keep their family homes present challenges. A participant shared a story about a 98-year-old woman that had been asked to move out of her house that her daddy built because her foundation is cracking and sinking and to move into the house next door until Habitat could fix the foundation. The resident chose to stay in her home.

The Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing community has also been directly affected 3 times in the last twelve years by major

natural disasters. A tornado with 136-165 mph winds in January 2017, another tornado with 170 mph winds in February 2013, and hurricane Katrina with sustained winds of 120 mph in August 2005 have left indelible marks on this community. Residents who had little were left with nothing. Many of the houses are not protected by insurance because having insurance not a part of the family habit therefore many families are completely wiped out. One participant noted that FEMA money was not adequate to meet the effected resident’s needs.

Community Needs from the Perspective of Residents

“We need public transportation access to this neighborhood.” The PTO president and other community volunteers agreed that the lack of public transportation is a limiting factor for residents. Parents would like to participate in sports events at the high school, but parents can’t attend because of transportation issues. Buses were purchased, and the routes were about to begin before the January 2017 tornado. The tornado destroyed the buses. Parents with kids at the preK-8 school in the neighborhood walk 2 miles to attend meetings.

Residents also noted the need for larger and better apartment complexes in the area. The ones available are not enough. This sentiment was echoed by volunteers who shared that the two major apartment complexes in the neighborhood are run down and one of the complexes has brown water. The PTO president lives in one of the neighborhood apartment complexes and says that she watches drugs being dealt on her sidewalk. Her kids are not allowed outside unless she or her husband are outside with them. There is a playground close by, but it is next to a pond with a fence around it, there is hole in the fence and the playground equipment is old. She is fearful of the hole in the fence because her children don’t swim.

The Feedback Loop Process as Described by the Participants

One participant shared that when Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing was chosen as the focus neighborhood they initially didn't get any input from the residents. When they started engaging the residents they thought they'd get invited by the neighborhood action teams to come talk about the FBL process or we could set up the first community conversation and the neighborhood action teams would broadcast information about the FBL process to their participants. What we found is that none of the four neighborhood action organizations had regular meetings and none of them had asked the residents what they wanted. Each neighborhood action team had their own agenda. For example, one neighborhood action team wanted to set up a pavilion so that they could BBQ. The Irene Chapel neighborhood action team didn't want to be a part of building a pavilion because they didn't want to be a part of Palmers Crossing.

Prior to receiving the funding for the FBL process implementation Hattiesburg Habitat neighborhood revitalization staff were awarded a \$2500 grant from Gulf States Health Policy Center, which they used to begin the FBL process implementation. Once the attempts to work with the neighborhood association teams failed the Habitat neighborhood revitalization manager partnered with the preK-8 principal to host community meetings in conjunction with parent meetings at the preK-8 school. It was during these meetings that residents began to engage, Habitat staff were able to find out what they wanted, and HABITAT staff were able to begin to help residents understand that they can assist residents in getting some of their concerns addressed. Some of the funds from the Gulf States Health Policy Center grant went to reimburse the preK-8 school for the use of their facilities and the establishment of the neighborhood watch and

Youth Entrepreneur Micro Loans youth mentorship program are both a direct result of this partnership.

One participant said, "What's going on in Palmers is sustainable and can be easily replicated." The partnership between the Hattiesburg Habitat neighborhood revitalization staff and the preK-8 school has resulted in real engagement of residents in conversations about their needs. The preK-8 school principal has intentionally worked to build relationship and trust with neighborhood residents over the 3 years that she has been principal. The residents see the principal's invitation to bring the Habitat staff into their parent meetings and they slowly begin to engage with the Habitat staff in the FBL process. A former student and resident volunteer to translate the meetings for the Hispanic residents. The community is highly transient. The principal reports that everyday 3-4 kids register, and 5-6 kids move, which adds to the difficulty of building relationships. However, the fact that some parents walk 2 miles to come to "Ms. Pollard's meetings" demonstrates how hard the principal has worked hard over the past 3 years to gain this kind of trust and interest of neighborhood residents.

Habitat staff are following the preK8 principal's lead with respect to developing relationships with the Hispanic residents. The preK-8 principal has recommended that they have a literacy meeting and use that meeting to engage the Hispanic residents in conversations about what things need to be worked on to improve their living conditions and they are moving forward with this recommendation. The preK-8 principal said:

"Habitat staff is engaged with feedback loops. I am driving parental involvement through the paths they are leading me down. Building relationships is really important in this community. Once I identified how different groups of parents react to data/information,

etc., what they need, and how they choose to communicate, I develop my strategies for engaging them. They do not like to meet long nor do they want to be put on the spot. They like that we share data and information regarding funding, community involvement, instructional help, etc. Some like information on paper. Some religiously follow us on social media and depend on our parent phones calls. Some prefer the newsletters and call us with questions, etc. I think feedback loops can be [standard operating procedure], but we must make adjustments. We have to understand who we are serving and how to keep them engaged.”

While one participant thinks that the engaged residents are thinking more about resident voice than the FBL process method because the residents don't fully understand the method, she still believes the residents recognize their opinion is important and valued. Earl Travillion Middle School helped get more people involved. Once residents were able to see the responses from the initial conversations in the word clouds they were able to understand that how addressing the flooding and having a pavilion did not have to be exclusionary from one another. Conversations during the community meetings were able to help them see that their concerns about having safe places for children and safety in general could be addressed by engaging in activities with neighbors in public spaces. A HABITAT staff participant also believes that the residents will come to the health and wellness strategies once trust is built. The HABITAT Neighborhood Revitalization Manager realizes the limitations of tapping into the current open door to the community that is the preK-8 school, so she is also exploring strategies to connect and interact with residents that don't have kids or a connection to Earl Travillion.

To date the Habitat affiliates role has been providing the funds for meetings, printing

notices, flyers, surveys, postcards, postage, feed at meetings. The hope as we build trust in the community, meet the first identified needs, to be more of a partner in change by providing housing products and financial training/counseling. The affiliate is thinking about the Feedback Loop Method and appreciates how it gives voice to residents who otherwise would not be heard. The FBL process has provided a tool that the affiliate has been seeking for years. One participant said, “Too often in meetings and forums we only hear the same few voices. Feedback Loops allows for more voices to be heard. We believe the prototype leverages voices. We have experienced how the technology can be a challenge, but the benefits are worth working around/through those challenges.”

Engagement of Residents, Community Groups, and Community Organizations

There are multiple groups and organizations providing resources and supports for this neighborhood and its residents. For example, the Hattiesburg Police Department participates in the block parties to build relationships for the neighborhood watch and William Carey University brings teacher candidates to offer free after school tutoring. Hattiesburg Habitat partnered with a local business to donate cleats to every member of the Earl Travillion football team. The Gulf States Health Policy Grant is a partnership between HABITAT, Earl Travillion, Gulf States Health Policy Center, and City of Hattiesburg and free health services are provided through Edward St. The translator has found that the reason Hispanics don't apply for citizenship is because they think they need an attorney and she is creating a tool kit for the Hispanics to try to dispel some of the myths. Habitat staff has also partnered with a volunteer who has connections through the local university and the faith community to negotiate data collection. This was necessary because in the past groups and individuals have come to the neighborhood with a grant and they get what

they want from the residents and leave. When the money runs out you have crippled the community because they came to trust the resource. One participant stated the following:

“We have learned that although there are several existing neighborhood associations however, they aren't effective. Through FBL process we've learned that there are shared concerns and there are ways they could work together if they took time to listen for understanding and not just listen to respond.”

Internal neighborhood divisions have also made development of relationships difficult. The neighborhood has 4 neighborhood action teams: Community Action Team, Concerned Citizens, Irene Chapel, and FORDETRA. FORDETRA is the oldest and reportedly most active and influential neighborhood action team and is made up of alumnae of the neighborhood preK-8 school. Participants shared that it has been difficult to get these groups focused on common neighborhood goals.

The fact that residents take pride in the school and see it as the center of their community demonstrates why leveraging the relationship the preK-8 principal has with neighborhood residents to engage residents in the FBL process makes sense. Residents were upset when the principal came because of their perceptions of the changes she was making, and they thought she was using the school's money for things they weren't on board with. However, the principal has been a change agent for the school. She's in favor of and has modeled advocacy for problems that residents have in the community. For example, there is an apartment complex in the neighborhood that has brown water. The principal has attempted to represent the residents at the city level to advocate to have the water problem fixed.

As one participant said, “There are many layers to this work.” Another participant said, “Strategies applied to engage residents in a middle to upper socio-economic community cannot be applied in low socio-economic communities.” Leaders that understand things like the truancy challenges at the school are related to poverty in the community are needed to build relationships that will lead to resident sharing their needs and trusting that the local organizations and partners will help them make change happen in their neighborhood. Another participant said, “It takes a village and understanding how to achieve a collective truth that speaks to what the village does and needs is important.”

Historically city council meetings have been a racial divide, three to two, but with the new mayor there seems to be more compromise across the board. Prevention of gentrification in the midst of the revitalization is desired by residents. A participant commented that if people have managed to maintain their home “we don't want them put out because of property taxes”. City government chooses to build new homes for some with disaster relief funds while others still have leaky roofs and sagging floors, a participant shared has contributed to the perpetuation of the neighborhood housing challenges. Equitable distribution of funds is a real issue and in addition to the racial and socio-economic divide there is a race privilege versus language privilege which cripple's residents with respect to advocating for themselves. One participant stated:

“Some people have a whole new house and some people still have leaky roofs..... [we're talking about the] Haves and have nots, educated and uneducated, blacks, Hispanics, and whites. We're talking about race privilege but not a lot about language privilege. It's hard to help white people understand that you're only a storm away from being just like the people you're looking down on.”

Language privilege refers to privilege provided an individual that clearly speaks the language of dominant culture. Individuals that lack language privilege are less likely to advocate for themselves and as a result have less access to goods and services. One participant shared that one thing that Katrina did was to bring people together across the racial divide and socio - economic divide. However, there still is some resentment among residents. Some feel “why should I pay insurance when they get a free house?” Irene Chapel/Palmers Crossing neighborhood leaders understand that opening conversations to equitably distribute funds is needed.

Discussion and Conclusion

By listening to the residents, affiliate staff, and volunteers within the community a unique insight into the activities surrounding and involved in the FBL process implementation in the Palmer’s Crossing/Irene Chapel community is observed. Through the FBL process the residents voice that transportation, housing, and places for people to safely be outside are real community concerns. From the point of view of the case study participants, challenges presented by acts of nature and choices made by city government directly impact the quality of life of the residents in this community. The need for purposeful channels of communication to be established among residents, between neighborhood action groups, and city government is evident. Leveraging relationships with community partners that have established trust is critical to development of purposeful communication. Understanding of culture, community socio-economic context, and the multiple layers of community engagement is critical, and this understanding once gained must be weaved into processes and policies that effect community engagement and the systems that govern and effect individuals within the community. Central to successful

capacity building for systemic and sustainable community change is the engagement of community leaders, stakeholders, and policy makers (Hood, 2004; Hopson & Hood, 2005; Toms & Hobbs, 1997; Toms, et. al. 2011).

Gaining understanding that what the community has to offer is rooted in developing relationships by spending time in the community. Relationship building is an integral part of the FBL process and in some ways, can be realized through the community conversations and co-creation of activities steps in the FBL process. Reciprocal or mutually beneficial relationships help in the building of trust, equity, and fairness as well as individual’s perceptions of trust, equity, and fairness. Reciprocity, empowers all stakeholders by creating space for all experiences and expertise, both individual and collective, to be viable in dialogue, development, planning, and implementation while not compromising attention to process, purpose, and decision-making (Toms & Burgess, 2014). Organizations that invest in understanding communities and responding from that space of understanding will see communities improve over time (Mačiulienė & Skaržauskienė, 2016).

Using the FBL process as a tool yields the ability to cross barriers and to co-design and co-create events, activities, and programs. Providing space for individuals to be heard, to share information focusing on the findings of data collected on purpose to inform the community, allowing time to dialogue about the information and to make decisions based upon information informed by all relevant voices creates an environment where change can occur. Once this environment has been cultivated the FBL process may be a tool that can be used to lead to organizational changes, changes in social climate, and concrete changes in quality of life.

Access to local amenities, economic opportunities, education, health care,

housing, safety, and transportation are proposed to impact quality of life. As organizations prepare staff and residents within communities become equipped to use data to make decisions that will bring about systemic and sustainable change acknowledging that all interactions between people teaches something is paramount (Hopson & Hood, 2005; Fetterman, 2017; Patton, 2017).

In the application of Frieman critical principles to evaluation Patton (2017) recommends using evaluative thinking to open up, develop, and nurture critical consciousness, where critical consciousness is defined as the attainment of deep, meaningful, realistic, and reality-based understanding of one's world. This consciousness resides in communities of people and individuals and this critical consciousness must be interactive, dialogical, reflective, and active. The Feedback Loop process implementation, which engages residents in facilitating community conversations, collecting data from residents to make decisions about neighborhood concerns, working with residents to make decisions on how to address the concerns, equipping residents to design a plan to address the concerns, and implementing the designed plan while making hearing from residents continuously and making changes as needed based on the vocalized needs of the residents, contains characteristics of this critical consciousness.

Nurturing of community and individual critical consciousness that leads to social cohesion and collective action must take into account cultural differences. Assumptions of understanding across diverse cultures leads to miscommunication, ineffective engagement, and ultimate discord (Brown & Cooper, 2011; Chávez et. al., 2007; House, 2017; Iverson, 2007; Kochman, 1991; Pratte, 1972; Winter, 2006). The concept of "language as privilege" means that the

language of the dominant culture is used to communicate and to understand issues. Any deviation from the language of the dominant culture breeds miscommunication and misunderstanding. Understanding of unfamiliar language occurs not just in interpretation of words but interpretation within the context of the culture where that language was developed.

Indicators of organizational readiness and staff preparedness to understand cultural differences and to effectively listen and communicate within the context of cultural differences should be assessed by organizations and appropriate teaching and learning opportunities should be engaged in as a part of the implementation of change processes (Adler & Coggin, 2005; Altschul, 2008; Brown & Cooper, 2011; De Gruyter, 2007; Foster-Fisherman, 2007; Grasby, et. al., 2005; Hood, 2004; Leung & Wang, 2015; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006; White, 2009). As the use of the FBL process as a tool to understand cultural differences in context may assist organization leaders and groups that desire to realize effective community engagement for positive, meaningful, purposeful, and systematic community change, thoughtful consideration should be given to the potential necessary shifts in institutional culture.

References

- Adler, R. P., & Coggin, J. (2005). What do we mean by "civic engagement?" *Journal of Transformative Education* 3(3), 236-53.
- Alinsky, S. D. (1962). *Citizen participation and community organization in planning and urban renewal*. Chicago, IL: Industrial Areas Foundation.
- Altschul, I., Oyserman, D., & Bybee, D. (2008). Racial-ethnic self-schemas and segmented assimilation: Identity and the academic achievement of Hispanic

- youth. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 71(3), 302-320.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Boykin, A. W., & Ellison, C. M., (1995). *Multiple ecologies of black youth socialization: An Afrographic analysis. African American Youth*. R. I. Taylor (Ed.). Praeger Publishers.
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 65-84.
- Chappell, B. (2008). To engage or consult? That is the question! *Incite*, 29(3), 8.
- Chávez, V., Minkler, M., Wallerstein, N., & Spencer, M. S. (2007). Community organizing for health and social justice. In L. Cohen, V. Chávez, & S. Chehimi (Eds.). *Prevention is primary: Strategies for community well-being* (1st ed., pp. 95-120). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.
- Corneille, M. A., Ashcroft, A. M., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2005). What's culture got to do with it? Prevention programs for African American adolescent girls. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 16(4), 38-47.
- Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- De Gruyter, A., Creighton, J. A., & R. C. Harwood (2007). *The organization-first approach: How intermediary organizations approach civic engagement and communities*. Bethesda, MD: The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation.
- Fetterman, D. (2017). Transformative empowerment evaluation and Frierean pedagogy: Alignment with an emancipatory tradition. In M.Q. Patton (Ed.) *Pedagogy of Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 155, 111-126.
- Foster-Fisherman, P., Cantillon, D., Pierce S., & Van Egeren, L. (2007). Building an active citizenry: The role of neighborhood problems, readiness and capacity for change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39, 91-106.
- Foster-Fisherman, P., Pierce, S., & Van Egeren, L. (2009). Who participates and why: Building a process model of citizen participation. *Health Education and Behavior*, 39, 550-69.
- Gay, L.R, Mills, G.E. & Airasian, P. W. (2012). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Grasby, D., Zammit, C., Pretty, G., & Bramston, P. (2005). Ready, set, go: Using the community readiness method to engage social networks for sustainable natural resource management in the Queensland and Murray-Darling basin. In: International Conference on Engaging Communities, Brisbane, Australia.
- Hood, S. (2004). A journey to understand the role of culture in program evaluation: Snapshots and personal reflections of one African American evaluator. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 102, 21-37.
- Hopson, R. K., & Hood, S. (2005). An untold story in evaluation roots: Reid Jackson and his contributions toward culturally responsive evaluation at three-fourths century. In S. Hood, R. K. Hopson, & H. T. Frierson Hood (Eds.), *The role of culture and cultural context: A mandate for inclusion, the discovery of truth, and understanding in evaluative theory and practice*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- House, E.R. (2017). Evaluation and the framing of race. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 38(2), 167-189.

- Iverson, S.V. (2007). Camouflaging power and privilege: A critical race analysis of university diversity politics. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), 586–611.
- Kochman, T. (1991). *Black and white styles in conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leung, K., & Wang, J. (2015). Social processes and team creativity in multicultural teams: A socio-technical framework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(7), 1008–1025. doi:10.1002/job.2021
- Mačiulienė, M., & Skaržauskienė, A. (2016). Evaluation of co-creation perspective in networked collaboration platforms. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(11), 4826–4830. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.038
- McBride, A., Sherraden, M., & Pritzker, S. (2006). Civic engagement among low-income and low-wealth families: In their words. *Family Relations*, 55, 152–62.
- McCloskey, D. J., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., & Mitchner, J. L. (Eds.). (2011). *Principles of Community Engagement* (2nd ed.). NIH Publication No. 11–728.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M.Q. (2017). Pedagogical principles of evaluation: Interpreting Friere. In M.Q. Patton (Ed.), *Pedagogy of Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 155, 49-77.
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pratte, R. (1972). The concept of cultural pluralism. *Philosophy of education*, 1972: Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, p. 62.
- Saldaña, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Toms, F.D., & Burgess, S. W. (2011). *Lead the way: Principles and practices in community and civic engagement*. San Diego, CA: Cognella.
- Toms, F. D., & Hobbs, A. (1997). Who are we? Building a knowledge base of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups in America. Forestville, MD: Diverse Books.
- Toms, F. D., Lloyd, C. L., Edwards-Carter, L., & Ellison, C. (2011). The faith-based community view of improving health and health care advocacy through engagement. *Practical Matters Journal*.
- Toms, F.D., & Toms, Z. L. (2011). Community engagement: A multifaceted framework and process. In Toms, F.D., Burgess, S. W. (Eds.), *Lead the way: Principles and practices in community and civic engagement*. (pp. 7-24). San Diego, CA: Cognella.
- Tyrone C. Howard. (2016). Why Black lives (and minds) matter: Race, freedom schools & the quest for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 101–113. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.2.0101
- Wallerstein, N. B., & Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health Promotion Practice*, 7(3): 312–23.
- White, B. P. (2009). Navigating the dynamics between institutions and their communities. Kettering Foundation, Dayton, OH.
- Winter, W. F. (2006). The measure of our days: Writings of William F. Winter. William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, University of Mississippi.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Acknowledgements

Habitat Neighborhood Revitalization Team
Rebecca Hix, Executive Director,
Neighborhood Revitalization
Melissa Rivera, Organizational
Development Consultant
Kelly Cox, Associate Director,
Neighborhood Revitalization
Calli Speakman, Technology Specialist
Habitat Hattiesburg Affiliate Staff and
Volunteers
Laura Goodwin-Wright, Habitat
Neighborhood Revitalization Manager

Dr. Marcus Gaut, Assistant Professor,
Coordinator, Doctor of Nursing Practice
Program, School of Leadership and Advanced
Nursing Practice, College of Nursing and
Health Professions, The University of
Southern Mississippi
Lucinda Pascarella, HAHfH Family
Selection Committee Chairperson
Kristina Pollard, Principal Earl
Travillion Attendance Center
Dr. Sue Whitcomb, Associate
Professor of Education, William Carey
University

Appendix

Interview Questions

Rapid Interview Questions

What have you and/or your neighborhood learned as a result of participating in the feedback loop pilot?

We understand that funding and advocacy were challenges you had with neighborhood revitalization. Please talk about your neighborhood's challenges with advocacy and/or funding.

Site Visit Interview Questions

Affiliate Staff, Volunteers, and Principal

Tell me about your neighborhood.

Tell me about the feedback loop process from your perspective.

Tell me about the strengths and challenges of implementing the FBL process.

Talk about how residents engaged (or did not engage) in the FBL process.

Talk about how community groups and organizations have been involved in the feedback loop process.

Residents

Tell me about your neighborhood.

Tell me about the feedback loop process from your perspective.

If you could do anything to improve her neighborhood what would it be?

Post Site Visit Interview Questions (Affiliate Staff, Volunteers, and Principal)

How are the affiliates/residents thinking about the FBL method? Is this about the method or are they thinking about the resident voice? Are the feedback loops the right way of doing this? Explain your thinking.

Why (or why not) should feedback loops be a part of standard operating procedure?

What does the FBL process look like in the future for your affiliate?

What's your affiliate's role in the coalition?

How did your affiliate share the FBL process with the board?

How does the prototype leverage voices or does the technology get in the way?