A Message from Our OXIHER Leaders

We are excited to introduce the first edition of the Community Empowered Health Playbook, designed to guide and support health initiatives in your region. This strategic framework is built on lessons from our OXIHER vaccine distribution efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a community-centered, data-driven, and health outcomes-focused approach.

Our Approach

Community engagement begins with a simple yet powerful principle: putting people first. By listening to our fellow Louisianians, we gain a deeper understanding of community needs. Our commitment is to collaborate intentionally with local partners - churches, health centers, community organizations, to ensure greater and more access to care.

From Engagement to Empowerment

Beyond planning activities, our ultimate success is measured by how many individuals we educate and empower to take control of their health. We aim to transform engagement into community empowerment by building on strengths and overcoming barriers.

The Impact of Our Work

By educating and empowering residents, and fostering regional partnerships, we can:

- Improve health outcomes
- Encourage healthier behaviors
- Increase life expectancy
- Lower barriers to care
- Expand health literacy
- Build stronger, more resilient communities

A Collective Effort

There is no hierarchy in this work, only a shared commitment among health systems, higher education, and community leaders and partners to improving the health and well-being of our neighbors.

Thank you for all you do. Please reach out with any questions or suggestions to help move this work forward.

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Our Mission

OXIHER (Ochsner-Xavier Institute for Health Equity and Research)

Ochsner Health and Xavier University of Louisiana partner to improve health outcomes, innovate care models, and promote access to care. Through OXIHER, we collaborate with health providers, government, insurers, employers, schools, and community organizations to improve Louisiana's health rankings and ensure fair and respectful care for all.

Section 1: Purpose and Goals of the Playbook

The Community Empowered Health Playbook is a guide to initiate, collaborate, and drive meaningful community health improvements. Our goal is to empower communities and regions with the tools to build effective and sustainable engagement strategies that address:

- **Community-Specific Needs** (e.g., breast cancer screenings, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment to reduce food insecurity)
- **Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA)**.
- **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)** (e.g., education, housing, transportation, poverty, food insecurity).

Our Health Outcomes-Focused Approach

We are creating a playbook that is:

- **Distributive** – Solutions tailored for both traditional and non-traditional settings.
- **Decentralized** – Shared power, sustained partnerships, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Digitally & Data-Driven** – Transparent, co-created solutions using shared data.
- **Inclusive** – Inclusivity remains the guiding principle.

Measurable Outcomes

- Number of longitudinal partnerships and alliances.
- Engagement with community leaders and community members.
- Number of community health events with health education and screenings.

Longitudinal partnerships are evolving collaborations where organizations or individuals commit to building deep, meaningful relationships over time that create products and outcomes that are sustainable. Longitudinal partnerships create lasting, impactful changes that are both inclusive and sustainable.

This playbook also includes event planning templates, promotional flyer guides, and checklists to streamline the process and reduce stress.

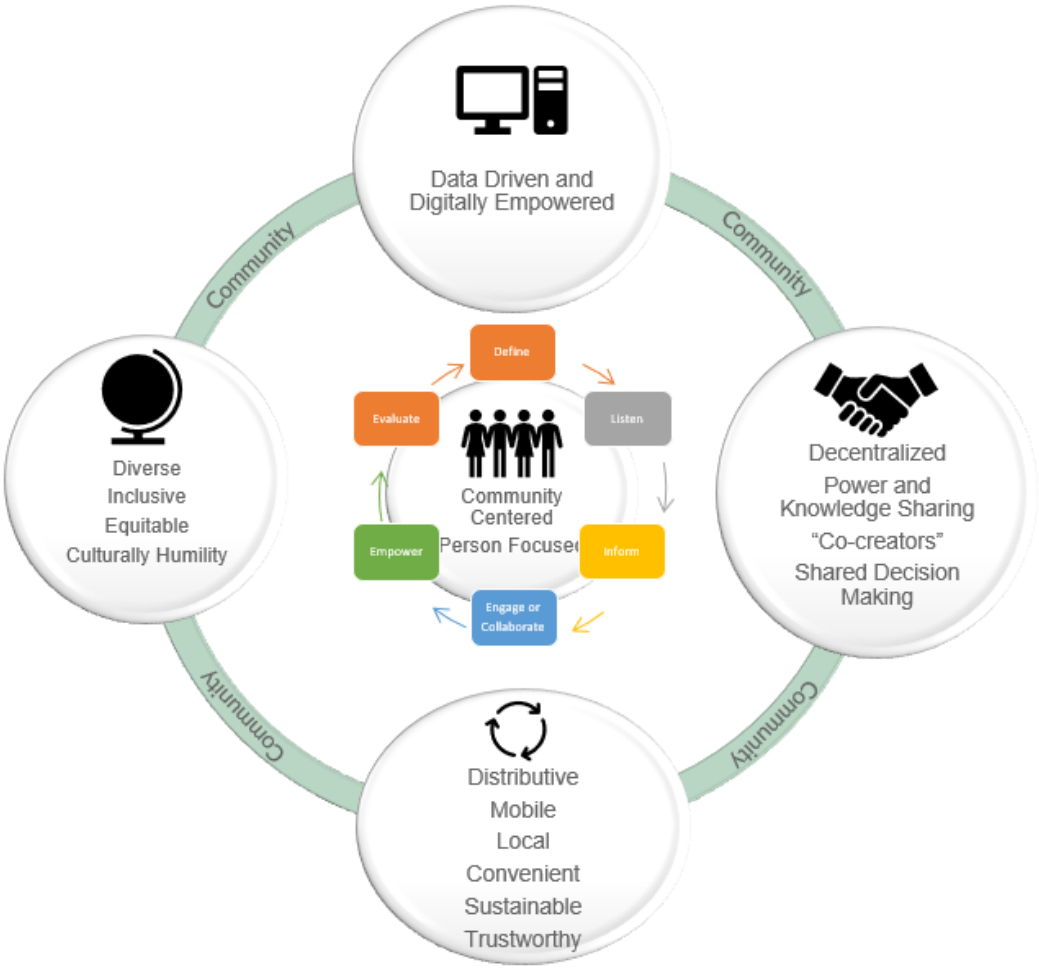
Please note that no information contained in this playbook is a substitute for professional medical advice and this document serves to provide resources for reference in your community engagement planning efforts.

Section 2: Our Community Engagement Framework (Laborde, 2023)[i]

The OXIHER Community Engagement framework is based on 4 principles:

- **Distributive**: Solutions extend beyond traditional healthcare.
- **Decentralized**: Shared power and decision making among partners.
- **Digitally & Data-Driven**: Using data for transparent, equitable decision-making.
- **Inclusive**: Addressing social determinants of health (SDOH).

Putting people at the center of our community engagement framework is essential to ensuring that our work is truly distributive, decentralized, digitally and data-driven, and inclusive. When we begin with people—listening to their voices, understanding their lived experiences, and co-creating solutions—we shift power outward, making space for community leadership rather than top-down decision-making. By grounding our strategies in the realities of those we serve, we create systems that are responsive, transparent, and resilient, ultimately fostering a community that is not only informed and engaged, but actively shaping its own future.



Before diving into strategy development, it's crucial to distinguish community engagement from community outreach. While outreach is a tool for engagement, our primary focus is sustained engagement that fosters long-term relationships and impact.

According to the nonprofit *Leading Differently*, outreach is *"a function of communicating to engaged partners, or gathering information or data from them"* (Leading Directly, 2022). In essence, outreach supports engagement by listening, promoting initiatives, and identifying key populations.

Engagement, however, is an ongoing process that integrates outreach efforts at various stages—such as conducting focus groups, organizing health expos, or promoting screenings at community hubs. The table below from *Leading Differently* (Hamerlinck 2022)[ii], further illustrates these distinctions.

Community Outreach	Community Engagement
Short-term	Long-term
Marketing	Relationship Building
What can A do for B?	What can A and B do together?
One Group Benefits Most	Community Benefits
Transactional	Connecting
Directional	Cyclical

Section 3: Define

Our Approach

Individuals and communities must be at the center of all health initiatives. By empowering communities as co-creators of programs and interventions, it ensures sustainable and impactful solutions.

Our approach is built on three core tenets:

1. **Focus on the whole person –** addressing the full context of a person's life that affects their health.
2. **Be community-centered and empowered –** understanding community needs and building capacity for community to lead and sustain initiatives.
3. **Build trust**

Beyond Traditional Healthcare

Our approach extends beyond biomedical models, recognizing that food security, transportation, housing, childcare, and social justice are critical determinants of health. To truly improve well-being, we must address these broader societal factors.

Listening to Communities: How to Gather Data

To understand community needs, we recommend:

1. **Conducting research**
    - Use **CDC PLACES** for population-level health data.
    - Refer to **Healthy People 2030** for national public health priorities.
    - Attend local legislative meetings and meet with community leaders.
2. **Connecting with local partners**
    - Develop a partner contact list including public health and social service organizations.
    - Identify regional health facilities.
    - Collaborate with community leaders to align strategies and shape messaging.
    - Adapt language to reflect community narratives and concerns.
    - Ask key questions:
        - Who is the "community"?
        - Where do people gather?
        - Who are the trusted voices?

    - What health priorities matter most to the community?
    - How does the community define empowerment?

Next Steps: Turning Insights into Action

- Develop and strengthen stakeholder connections and maintain communication.
- Leverage existing focus group data or conduct town halls to refine engagement strategies.
- Identify partnership opportunities to identify or close service gaps (consider changes in policies and availability of resources).
- Plan and host focus groups or town halls as needed to gather further insights.
- Conduct surveys or interviews to supplement understanding.

By prioritizing listening, collaborating, and acting, we can create effective health solutions that truly serve communities.

Section 4: Listen & Inform

Listening to the Community

Engaging directly with the community is essential to understanding their challenges and needs. People must remain at the center of our work. By asking questions—*Why is Mary experiencing food insecurity? Why is Sam hesitant about cancer screenings?* - we can develop human-centered solutions that address the immediate health needs of the community.

Leveraging Research Data

CDC defines qualitative research as a social science inquiry that explores context, motivations, and behaviors (CDC, 2018)[iii]. While focus groups, interviews, and surveys are valuable, they can be time-consuming. Fortunately, existing data from community, governmental, and faith-based organizations can provide crucial insights.

Alternative Approaches

- Meet 1:1 with faith leaders, non-profit executives, health workers, clinicians, and social service providers.
- Request existing data from local organizations.
- Use virtual tools for data sharing and collaboration.

If necessary, conducting a listening tour[iv] or focus group can help refine our approach. Detailed instructions for conducting a focus group are available in Section 8 - Resources.

Additional Research Methods

Refer to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services table in Section 8 – Resources for a summary of qualitative methods[v]. Select the most effective approach for your efforts in consultation with your community partners.

Interpreting & Applying Insights

Understanding the results requires both expert analysis and community input. Sharing and discussing findings with community leaders ensures that their voices shape the conclusions.

Listening to community members' needs, concerns, and aspirations empowers collaborators to design initiatives that truly serve the community. Active listening fosters trust and helps to identify actionable steps to convene the right partners and develop initiatives that align with the stated needs of the community.

Section 5: Engage & Empower

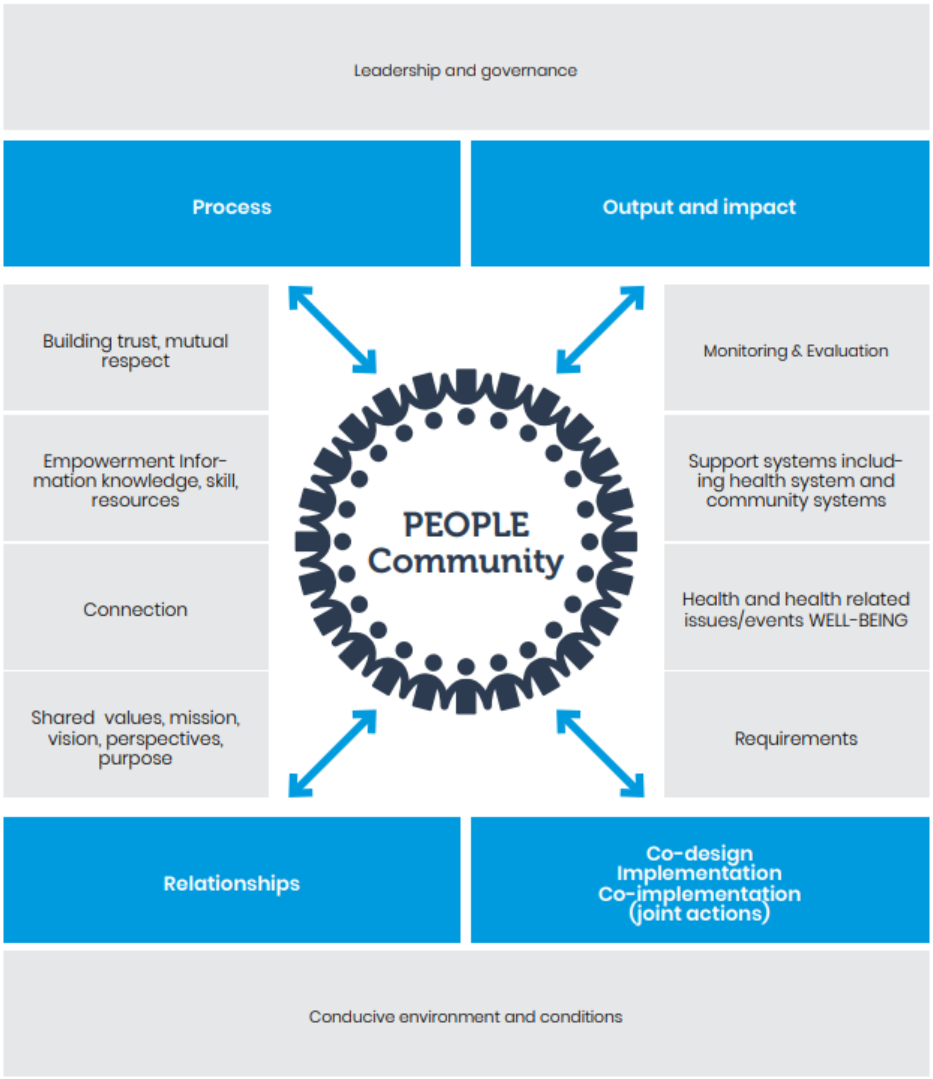
Community Engagement: A People-Centered Approach

Harnessing local resources, expertise, and trusted voices, we aim to develop innovative, community-driven solutions. Community engagement is both a process and an outcome, shifting from a top-down model to a human-centered approach, as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017)[vi].

WHO's Community Engagement Framework

A strong, resilient health system requires interconnected efforts between stakeholders and the communities they serve. By fostering trust, shared knowledge, and collaborative skills, we work toward a mutual vision for quality healthcare with measurable outcomes that define and enhance healthcare system effectiveness (WHO 2017)[vii].

Community engagement model for the CE framework



From Engagement to Empowerment

By focusing on listening, informing, and engaging, the shared goal is to empower individuals and organizations to take collective action for collective impact.

Turning Strategy into Action

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, this Playbook provides frameworks and checklists that translate concepts into effective, real-world initiatives for lasting community impact.

Section 6: Outreach & Event Framework

Guiding Community Engagement Efforts

To develop impactful activities aligned with community-specific needs, CHNA and SDOH, the following steps are recommended:

Community Engagement Checklist

- **Analyze Heatmaps** to identify priority community needs and locations.
- **Gather Data** from partners and direct community engagement.
- **Develop an Event/Outreach Proposal** aligned with community needs.
- **Validate Proposal** with key stakeholders and community partners.
- **Identify External Partners** for collaboration and support.
- **Execute the Event** and engage the community.
- **Collect and Share Data** with key stakeholders and community partners.
- **Celebrate Success** and/or adjust to build upon that success.
- **Continue Developing External Partnerships** to create a long-lasting, sustainable program.

Implementation Process

1. **Leverage Heatmaps:** CDC Places-powered tools pinpoint health concerns like smoking prevalence, diabetes, cancer, and high blood pressure down to specific streets.
2. **Enrich Data:** Supplement heatmap insights with qualitative data from partners, community discussions, and research. Understanding the "why" behind the numbers strengthens programming – for example, if 20% of adults in the community are current cigarette smokers, what are the barriers to quitting?
3. **Secure Partnerships:** Identify external partners for co-branding, health screenings, and additional resources.
4. **Draft & Validate Proposals:** Submit proposals for review by community partners. This ensures alignment with community needs, CHNA, and SDOH.
5. **Execute & Evaluate:** Host the event, collect participation data, and conduct a post-event debrief to refine future efforts.

Section 7: Evaluate

Post-Event Evaluation & Improvement

Assessing the success of an event is crucial for refining future efforts[viii]. Within one week, submit the following details to key stakeholders:

Event Summary

- **Event Name & Location** (Place, City, Zip Code, Region)
- **Number of Attendees**
- **Number of Volunteers**
- **Objective Contributions to Community**
    - **Example: Health Screenings Provided** (e.g., Blood Pressure, Flu Vaccine, with quantities)
    - **Example: Educational Materials Distributed** (e.g., Smoking Cessation, Career Counseling, Resume Building)

Two-Week Follow-Up Report

1. **Celebrate Success**
    - How did this event empower community members?
    - Identify three key successes from the event (Laoyan, 2022)[ix].
    - Share best practices with key stakeholders.
2. **Plan for the Future**
    - What challenges arose, and how can they be addressed?
    - What improvements should be made for future events?
3. **Final Thoughts**
    - Did the anticipated vs. actual metrics align? Explain any discrepancies and contributing factors.

This structured evaluation ensures continuous improvement, fostering stronger, more impactful community engagement efforts.

Section 8: Resources

Below you will find the following documents:

A. **CDC Audience Research Methods**
B. **Planning a Focus Group**
C. **Activity/Event Development Checklist.**
D. **Activity/Event Proposal Template.**

Resource A: CDC Audience Research Methods[x]

Method	Description	Use Method If…	Benefits	Limitations
Focus Groups	Groups of 8–10 people selected from the target audience who serve as a sample.	- Group interaction is desirable. - Participants can be assembled in one location. - Subject matter is not too sensitive. **Example: Learn about audience perceptions of a tobacco-free lifestyle.**	- Allows in-depth discussion and insights. - Enhances understanding of quantitative data.	- Small sample size may not be representative. - Responses are qualitative.
In-Depth Interviews	Individual interviews with 10 or more people, using open- and close-ended questions.	- Group interaction is not beneficial. - Topic is sensitive. - Gathering at a central location is impractical. **Example: Uncover school administrators' challenges in implementing tobacco-free programs.**	- Can address sensitive topics. - Flexible format (phone, Zoom or in-person). - Useful for policymakers and professionals.	- Small sample size may not be representative. - Qualitative responses. - Time-consuming.
Central Location Intercept Interviews	Brief (5–10 minutes) structured interviews conducted at a key location.	- Quick feedback on specific materials (e.g., posters, ads, brochures).	- Large number of respondents in a short time.	- Limited depth of responses. - Captures "gut reactions" rather than detailed opinions.
Surveys	Uses a structured questionnaire, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.	- Quantifiable results are needed. - A baseline measure is required for tracking progress.	- Provides statistically reliable estimates. - Measures levels, actions, and trends. - Useful for tracking changes over time.	- Can be costly. - May suffer from low response rates.

Resource B: Planning a Focus Group[xi]

Effective Focus Group Facilitation

The University of Kansas created The Community Tool Box that includes a Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups. The "Toolbox" is a free on-line resource that provides modules and tools to help "build healthier communities" (University of Kansas, 2014).[xii] The recommendations below from the Tool Box will aid in the planning and hosting of a focus group.

Guiding Principles

Whether you're a facilitator, partner, student, or trained professional, keep these key points in mind:

- Consider hosting a virtual focus group if in-person is not possible.[xiii]
- Treat the discussion as a conversation between facilitator and participants.
- Let participants steer the dialogue, intervening only when necessary.
- Use a structured interview guide but allow for natural flow.
- Focus groups help understand community perspectives in their own words.

Tips for Successful Communication

- **Set a Comfortable Tone:** Start with an icebreaker (e.g., having participants discuss their favorite musician or sharing something they love about their community).
- **Encourage Questions:** Allow participants to ask about you and the group's purpose.
- **Discuss Key Issues:** Explore community narratives, preferred language, and inclusivity concerns.
- **Avoid Yes/No Questions:** Encourage open-ended discussions.
- **Maintain Engagement:** Use appropriate eye contact, neutral body language, and active listening.
- **Record & Take Notes:** Always document responses (with permission) and summarize key points.
- **Balance Participation:** Encourage quieter voices to share insights without putting them on the spot.

Engaging Participants in Analysis

Encourage reflection by asking:

- *What is the most important issue we discussed today?*
- *What should be the priority in your community?*

Limitations to Consider

- **Facilitator Bias:** Preconceived notions can impact discussions.

- **Group Influence:** Participants may be swayed by dominant voices.
- **Moderator Skill:** Requires experience to manage dynamics and extract insights.
- **Time-Intensive:** Data synthesis and analysis require effort.

By fostering open dialogue and structured analysis, focus groups can be powerful tools for understanding and addressing community needs effectively.

Resource C: Community Engagement Action Checklist

Planning & Preparation

✓ **Review Heatmaps and CHNA** – Use **PLACES: Local Data for Better Health | CDC** to identify priority areas and issues and **Community Health Needs Assessments** to better understand the needs identified in these reports.

✓ **Engage External Partners** – Connect with organizations serving targeted communities.

✓ **Listen to Partners and Community Members** – put the community at the center of your proposed activity by understanding their priorities.

✓ **Develop an Activity/Event Proposal** – Draft a detailed plan (see Resource D).

✓ **Validate the Proposal** – Obtain approval from key stakeholders and community partners.

Execution & Follow-Up

✓ **Hold the Event** – Implement the planned activities.

✓ **Collect & Share Data** – Report key insights to key stakeholders.

✓ **Celebrate & Reflect** – Acknowledge success and identify areas for future improvement.

By following this checklist, you can ensure a strategic, data-driven, and impactful community engagement initiative.

Resource D: Activity/Event Proposal Template

Overview & Logistics

1. **Event Name**
2. **Target Population**
3. **Primary Objective**
4. **Primary Partner/Co-Sponsor** (if applicable)
5. **Date & Time**
    - Date:
    - Start Time:
    - End Time:
    - Total Duration (excluding setup/breakdown):
6. **Location**
    - Address:
7. **Participant Transportation**
    - Provided? (Y/N) If yes, specify details.
    - If no, list nearest public transportation stops.

Key Contacts

9. **Event Coordinator(s)**
    - Name, Title, Email, Cell Phone
11. **Event Team Members**

Mission & Goals

12. **Specific Event Goals** (List and elaborate as needed)
13. **External Partners** (List and specify contributions)
14. **Outreach Strategy**
    - Health Facilities, Community Partners, Churches, Schools, Businesses, Police Department, CHCs, etc.
15. **Media Plan**
    - Social Media, Radio, TV, Press
16. **Budget & Funding**
    - Expenses: Space, Volunteers, Equipment, Media, Refreshments, Other Costs

- Funding Sources:

17. **Materials/Supplies Needed**

Metrics for Success

18. **Health Screenings Offered**
    - Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Lung Capacity, PSA, Eye Exam, Hearing Exam, Mammography, Flu Vaccine, COVID Vaccine, Other
19. **Attendance & Volunteers**
    - Number of Attendees
    - Number of Volunteers
20. **Educational Materials Distributed**
    - Smoking Cessation, Mental Health, SNAP/WIC Benefits, Workforce Development, Cancer Screenings, Housing/Transportation, Other

Volunteer Management

21. **Total Volunteers Required**
22. **Recruitment Plan**
23. **Volunteer Coordinators** (Name, Title, Contact)
24. **Volunteer Communication Plan**
    - **Pre-Event:** What to wear/bring, provided materials, parking, check-in details
    - **Day of Event:** Assignments, emergency procedures, waivers, breaks/lunch
    - **Post-Event:** Surveys, Thank You Notes
25. **Volunteer Assignments & Responsibilities**
26. **Clinical Supervisor Required? (Y/N)** If yes, provide contact details.
27. **Additional Comments**

This structured template ensures clarity, alignment with strategic goals, and a streamlined event planning process.

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