

# Extractive Knowledge: Epistemic and Practical Challenges for Higher Education Community Engagement

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## Abstract

Extractive knowledge is prevalent in higher education community engagement. It is a type of epistemic injustice that is harmful to the historically and systemically minoritized communities and community nonprofits that many universities, particularly predominately white institutions, seek to engage. Extractive knowledge results from what we can think of as transactional relationships with community members or community nonprofits. These are largely superficial but impactful relationships perpetuating injustice in higher education spaces that imagine themselves working to create greater justice. In this article, we make two primary arguments: a.) Extractive knowledge is an epistemic injustice prevalent in community-engaged higher education, and b.) The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's model for transformative community engagement and the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community's Practice Principles provide strategies and models for more epistemically just approaches to community engagement that shape knowledge in epistemically responsible ways, in partnership with communities and alignment with communities' goals and outcomes, this paper finishes with the Fitz Center's Health Equity Program and a community-led partnership as examples of these Practice Principles that lead toward reciprocal, responsible, community-driven, and transformational community engagement.

## Introduction

Wealth extraction results from nations, states, cities, and corporations removing resources from communities and setting up conditions so that future wealth in these communities cannot be obtained, accessed, and accrued. In the US, redlining, the historical practice of race-based grading of neighborhoods to both segregate people and to ensure white wealth is a prime example of national, state, city, and corporate-sanctioned and enabled wealth extraction. Most formerly redlined communities in the US are still highly impacted by the loss of resources and the ongoing difficulties in bringing wealth back to these communities.

There is an epistemically parallel structure to wealth extraction – extractive knowledge. Extractive knowledge is not a new practice. Like wealth extraction, it has a long history of settler colonialism. Settler colonialists took knowledge, such as land and scientific knowledge, from communities, casting it as their own and shaping it for their uses (Dahlin and Fredriksson 2017). The rise of community engagement through higher education has been remarkable and has had substantial benefits for students, academia, and many communities. However, it has not come without its impacts, extractive knowledge being one of these. Early higher education community engagement (1990s to early 2000s) approached its work as inherently and unquestionably beneficial to communities because institutions, students, and faculty were seen as “serving” their communities. In her 2007 article “Critical Service-Learning as Social Justice Education: A Case Study of the Citizen Scholars Program,” Tania D. Mitchell examined higher education community engagement, particularly service learning. In doing so, she pushed institutions to examine the injustices their work perpetuates on communities more closely. “Extractive Knowledge: Epistemic and Practical Challenges for Higher Education Community Engagement” identifies and frames another harmful and unnamed practice in higher education community engagement: extractive knowledge. This paper is part of a larger body of scholarship carried forward by many scholars and practitioners of community engagement, including those in [Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices](#) (2023), which was published as we were completing this article. Extractive knowledge is a typical feature of racist community engagement.

This paper will argue that extractive knowledge is an epistemic injustice that harms the systemically and historically minoritized communities and community nonprofits that many universities, particularly predominately white institutions, seek to engage. Extractive knowledge results from what we can think of as transactional relationships with community members or community nonprofits. These are largely superficial but impactful relationships perpetuating injustice in higher education spaces that imagine themselves working to create greater justice. This paper has two aims: a.) to develop the concept of extractive knowledge in community engagement, showing the ways that it is a type of epistemic injustice, and b.) to share strategies and examples for more epistemically just approaches to community engagement that shape

knowledge in epistemically responsible ways, in partnership with communities, and alignment with communities' goals and outcomes. We finish by presenting epistemically responsible strategies through a case example demonstrating how implementing Fitz Center's "Practice Principles" and Robert Wood Johnson's guiding community engagement principles converge to shape relationships between community members and universities that prevent knowledge extraction and develop transformative community engagement.

## **Extractive Knowledge**

Extractive knowledge is the practice of pulling epistemic resources, i.e., knowledge, skills, and practices, from communities and utilizing these for one's own needs or institutional needs without reciprocity, mutually beneficial and co-developed outcomes, and transparency. It is a type of institutional epistemic injustice enacted collectively and individually by members of institutions that have an asymmetrical relationship with the communities in which they engage. Epistemic injustice is a term coined by Miranda Fricker in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing* (2007), but conceptually, it had been richly developed by feminist and critical race philosophers, such as Lorraine Code (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (1991), and Charles Mills (1997), before Fricker developed the term. As Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. argues, epistemic injustice refers to an overlapping cluster of epistemic practices and institutions that create harm to a person or persons as knowers and "cause epistemic dysfunction, for example by distorting understanding or stymieing inquiry" (2017, p.13).

Extractive knowledge is a prevalent type of epistemic injustice that is an outgrowth of institutional epistemic injustice. In her article "Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions," Elizabeth Anderson (2012) argues that institutions simultaneously reflect and generate knowledge. Because of this knowledge-making capacity, we should think of institutions, such as educational, judicial, political, and health institutions, as *epistemic institutions*. For Anderson, institutions are pathways through which epistemic justice and injustice are established and/or enacted. These institutional pathways have epistemic injustices structurally built into them that result in testimonial epistemic injustice, an injustice that questions non-dominant persons' capacities and efficacies as epistemic agents. Institutions that operate in a testimonially unjust manner perpetuate structural "group-based credibility deficits... [such as] differential markers of credibility; ethnocentrism; and 'the shared reality bias'" (Anderson, 2012, p.169). Anderson argues that these institutional epistemic injustices are particularly harmful and hard to identify because they can occur even though there may not have been individual epistemic failings. In other words, individuals could operate epistemically virtuously, but the institution is structured to perpetuate epistemic vice. A particular challenge is that the scale and impact of institutions can result in greater levels of epistemic injustice primarily from institutional structures and their practices and not necessarily from individuals who engage with the community. Because these epistemic injustices are built into the structure

of institutions, they need substantial foundational reconfiguring of institutional practices to ameliorate them (Anderson, 2012, p.169).

Extractive knowledge in higher education community engagement, particularly at predominately white institutions, presents a unique challenge in institutional epistemic injustice because whether community members and nonprofit organizations are seen to have a credibility deficit is situational. The community members and nonprofit organizations engaged are frequently seen as highly credible and uniquely situated epistemic agents, both in their capacity and capacities as members of communities and organizations. They have the knowledge, experience, and expertise desired by faculty and higher education institutions. Thus, they are not experiencing testimonial injustice in the way it has been framed because their testimony is viewed as valuable and unique. Instead, they are *given* special epistemic status by dominant knowers. Note we are not trying to suggest that community members and nonprofit organizations don't have significant knowledge and expertise. Instead, we are analyzing how community members and nonprofits *as epistemic agents* are sometimes engaged in higher education community engagement in ways that systemically recognize and value the epistemic status of systemically minoritized community members, yet use their knowledge, experiences, and expertise for the ends of the institution and its goals. Like wealth extraction, the knowledge of systemically minoritized community members is seen as a valuable resource to be used by institutions and individuals in institutions to further their goals.

A ready example of this is the faculty practice at PWIs of bringing racially minoritized community members and nonprofit leaders to campus to speak to their students so that the students can hear their testimony and learn from it, built on the assumption that the time, resources, and knowledge of these community members and leaders will result in changes in the knowledge and actions of students at the PWI. Students are expected to learn the truths revealed through these conversations without the institutional structures of PWIs changing how they interact with communities. Thus, there is an assumption that bringing racially minoritized community members and nonprofit leaders into a higher education learning environment will destabilize the narrative systems and beliefs of students. Additionally, there is an assumption that students will act differently within the world without understanding the deeply entrenched nature of oppressive belief systems and narratives (Posey, 2021) and how PWI's structures, practices, and knowledge systems reinforce these. Thus, The work is on the community members' and nonprofit leaders' side to incite change, not the institution, faculty members, or students. Kristie Dotson (2014), in "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," highlights the incredible hurdles that must be overcome in institutional epistemic systems. Dotson argues that there is an "epistemological resilience" to "maladjusted system(s)" (p.16) that serve as "roadblocks to ever acknowledging the existence of...epistemic oppression" (p.19). In a similar vein, Nancy Arden McHugh argues in "Epistemic Deadspaces: Prisons, Politics, and Place" (2021) that some institutions, including PWIs, are constructed as "habitats designed to shutdown knowing" that

house “practices of privilege and domination and obscure the actors and actions of material and epistemic domination” (pp. 50-51). Epistemic deadspaces create dysfunctional epistemic structures and are also created by broader dysfunctional social structures. Thus, extractive knowledge in this example rests on a false assumption of change for students and institutions when the institutions themselves are resistant to change, and the students are operating and learning within the framework of institutions that are resistant to change.

Other examples of extractive knowledge in community-engaged higher education are student course projects and research projects for or with community partner organizations. Students can learn with community members, frequently at partner sites, or alongside community partners. The assumption is that this will be a “win-win” situation where students learn from the work with the partner organization and community members, and the organization and the community members will get something tangible and usable in return for their investment and knowledge. As community partner organizations frequently complain, they invest their knowledge upfront with students and expect something to result from what they have given. However, students work on semester schedules, which could result in incomplete work. Another barrier is created if student work is done poorly, not implemented, or not sustainable after the semester.

Nonprofits do not work on semesters; community partners seek more than a one-way, one-time partnership. Yet, higher education is frequently resistant to reframing its work with partner organizations and community members beyond the structure of a semester, expecting partners to conform to, or at minimum accept, this system. Higher education does not challenge itself to rethink how this adherence to the semester structure in community engagement is an impediment to truly reciprocal, non-extractive relationships with community partners and that university silos can prohibit robust support for community partners.

These critiques are echoed in an analysis of service learning, another popular form of community engagement in which students typically have an add-on to their course that involves them going individually to a nonprofit organization to serve to enhance student learning. In “Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-Based Organizations' Perspectives on Service Learning,” Blouin & Perry (2009) sought to understand if service-learning courses, as a form of community engagement, benefit the community they claim to be serving. Blouin and Perry interviewed community organization leaders, including “13 executive directors, four volunteer coordinators and three program directors” (p.123). From here, Blouin and Perry were able to group these responses into three categories: benefits, costs associated with investments of resources, and challenges related to student conduct and course alignment. Community organization leaders reported risks related to investing in resources that “do not yield tangible returns [and] poorly prepared service learners failing to treat clients with respect or breaching confidentiality agreements” (p.126). Another challenge identified by these community organization leaders was a misalignment of faculty-designed course outcomes with the overall

mission of their organizations, as faculty did not co-produce course outcomes with partner organizations. Thus, this study illustrates how service-learning programs and projects are often misaligned with the mission and goals of the partnering organization and don't yield the outcomes that universities and faculty believe they will. In doing so, this not only impedes student learning but, more critically, has the potential to harm the ability of a nonprofit organization to move forward with its mission. Instead of moving forward the nonprofit's mission, it is moving forward the mission of the higher education institution, thus representing another form of extractive community engagement.

Part of the systemic challenge here is that universities typically see their highest goal in these situations as student learning, not their obligations to the communities in which they are embedded. Thus, when these frameworks are built on student growth and knowledge acquisition being the highest goal, the outcome will always be extractive because extraction is the goal. To disrupt this, academic institutions involved in community engagement need to understand themselves embedded within communities that have responsibilities toward mutually beneficial and reciprocal outcomes.

Another extractive knowledge challenge is that while, in some instances, community members are considered to have special epistemic status by faculty and other university constituents, higher education institutions typically do not reward or recognize this knowledge in ways that approximate how we value other types of expertise and work. For example, while community members frequently contribute substantially to community-engaged research, they frequently are not listed as co-authors on the publications produced through community-engaged research. Additionally, community members and partner organizations are frequently not awarded stipends for their time with students or their time devoted to research projects. One could argue that if the student's work and research are for their benefit, it would seem odd to reward their time. However, faculty and students are awarded and recognized for their course and research efforts through mechanisms internal to higher education. Faculty have rewards such as tenure and promotion, annual merit raises, research stipends, course releases, and teaching and community engagement awards. Scholarships reward students for community engagement, credit for coursework, end-of-semester grades, course credit, and a diploma at graduation. Given this lack of recognition and reward, it enforces that the knowledge is worthy of extraction but not recognition and reward. It is thus still subpar knowledge in the eyes of the academy. A more reciprocal approach would recognize community partners as co-producers of knowledge, both with our students and in our research, build into funding opportunities stipends for community members, actively involve them in outcome deliberations on courses and projects, include them as co-authors on publications, develop community fellows models where community members are embedded in university centers, and develop a reciprocal model in which faculty and graduate students are embedded in partner organizations.

As we identified above, the pervasiveness of extractive knowledge in community-engaged higher education does not mean there are no ways to have epistemically just community-engaged work in higher education. There are practices available for academic departments, community engagement centers, and other higher education institutions that can be adapted and adjusted to uphold the community's position as knowers and develop reciprocal relationships between communities and higher education institutions. The next section explores a framework and practices that can yield epistemic justice in community engagement.

## **Transforming Higher Education Community Engagement**

There is a growing consideration for literature on emerging foundational practices that guide community engagement within higher education institutions undergirded by critical analysis and informed by community-based research. As university leaders begin thinking about how to situate themselves as assets in partnership with surrounding communities, it is worth noting that there is literature that has emphasized specific approaches to establishing equitable and epistemically responsible university-community partnerships. For example, Syed M. Ahmed et al. (2016) conducted research that analyzed 109 community-academic partnership projects from 2005 to 2011. Foundational attributes of successful community-academic partnerships emerged from this study, including relationship building, communication, collaboration, and community involvement.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), a leader in generating systems change in health equity, critically assesses what constitutes community engagement in a way that many other institutions, including higher education institutions, have not. As we argued in the previous section, higher education institutions, particularly PWIs, frequently develop interactions with community members and nonprofits that they describe as community-engaged. However, while these may involve the community, the structure of the interactions does not approximate what RWJF would describe as sufficiently engaged for some of the same reasons we articulated above. As argued in “Transformational Community Engagement to Advance Health Equity,” when an institution engages communities without “equity as its leading principle” and without “accounting for power imbalances,” the work of the institution is “likely to exacerbate or maintain existing inequities” (Health Equity Solutions, 2022, p.1). Thus, for community engagement to address inequities and to increase equitable outcomes for communities, it must be intentionally designed and implemented, and, importantly, share power with communities by partnering with communities on the design and implementation. These practices start to move community engagement toward what RWJF describes as transformational community engagement. Transformational community engagement is characterized by relationships founded on “trust, transparency, and mutual accountability” (p 2). Power sharing is built into this foundation so that community members and nonprofits “can engage safely and robustly and have a measurable influence on engagement priorities that lead to sustained change” (p.2). In contrast

to epistemically extractive relationships, these transformative engagements are built on sustained relationships that involve the community in all levels of design making, work to maximize access to information, resources, and working spaces, have active mechanisms for feedback/mutual accountability and critique and are designed to lead to change.

The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton has a set of “Practice Principles” developed over twenty years ago that guide our work. These principles share characteristics with RWJF’s transformational community engagement framework and connect to Ahmed et al.’s findings through a shared commitment to sustained relationships, trust, accountability, transparency, and the sharing of power. Many of these practices developed from the University of Dayton’s foundation in Marianist values. The University of Dayton is one of three members of the Association of Marianist Universities (AMU). In 2007 and 2017, community engagement practitioners from the AMU came together to discuss shared practices and commitment to civic and community engagement. In 2017, they created a white paper called “Community and Civic Engagement in Catholic and Marianist Universities: The Conversation Continues.” This white paper outlines the perspective and foundation of community engagement at these universities, stating that Marianist Universities “are in an advantageous position to meet this call for promoting civic learning and democratic engagement because of the Church’s commitment to social justice, solidarity, and human dignity” (p.3). These universities’ mission and core motivation can help ensure transformational community engagement if done intentionally.

Key qualities make the Marianist approach to community engagement unique from this rootedness in social justice, solidarity, and human dignity. These qualities include a focus on “right relationships,” which Brother Ray Fitz describes as those relationships that “enhance human dignity and the common good, are intentional and reciprocal, and are motivated by solidarity” (Bro. Ray Fitz email exchange July 27, 2023). Furthermore, there is a commitment to place-based and assets-based perspectives, the sharing of power, and practices of social inquiry, as well as a focus on action and co-creation of knowledge and shared learning among the students, faculty/staff, and partners as equals. There is an active commitment to social transformation, including changing institutions and challenging power structures, including within one’s institution. The commitment is thus also to active reflection that can lead to adaptive change. When these values are layered with the Fitz Center’s Practice Principles these together create the groundwork for transformative community engagement and help to mitigate extractive relationships.

The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community is named after Brother Ray Fitz, a Marianist brother and instrumental figure in the university’s engagement in the Greater Dayton community. The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community aims to move Brother Ray’s legacy forward through our commitment to sustained relationships with dozens of neighborhoods,



community nonprofits, and government organizations and associations. It serves as a connecting point and campus-wide partner for community partnerships, community-engaged learning and scholarship, and innovative solution-based strategies to meet community-identified needs through an asset-based approach. While the Fitz Center derives its mission from the Marianist values, it is important to note that our work is inclusive of all communities, and these are practices that can readily be used by institutions that are not faith-based, in part because they were developed out in communities and with nonprofits that were not necessarily faith-based. The Fitz Center lives its values through five Practice Principles that drive our strategy for community engagement. These principles work synergistically and are mutually dependent on each other for just outcomes in community engagement. One way to think of these principles is as a pathway or guiding steps toward socially and epistemically just community engagement. They are action-oriented principles, not ideals to be considered. The overall benefit of universities engaging with communities in epistemically just ways ensures that the university's position of power does not overshadow the community's involvement. In this way, foundational practices and principles are important in both guiding community engagement, as well as undergirding the critical analysis and self-reflection necessary to sustain these partnerships.

The starting point for the Practice Principles is that the community identifies a goal or outcome. Identifying this goal or outcome engages the Practice Principles toward solution generation and implementation. The five Practice Principles developed below are community assets, social capital, constructive public conversation, adaptive capacity, and widely shared vision.

## Community Assets

The Fitz Center approaches communities through an asset-based approach, believing that communities meet their needs and solve problems with their gifts, strengths, and assets. An asset-based approach counters the approach that starts with the needs and deficits of communities. Deficit-based thinking in community engagement is deeply problematic and has roots in white supremacist thinking. Edward Olivos (2006) argues, "The evolution of deficit theories and the unequal treatment of people of color in relation to whites function to legitimize racial discrimination and are the product of white supremacy" (p.49). The asset-based approach to community engagement, especially those built with other principles attentive to power, actively seeks to dismantle deficit thinking. When doing our work, instead of focusing on or prioritizing a community's barriers, the Fitz Center takes the approach of facilitation of community collaboration through recognition of what the community's strengths are. An asset-based approach also helps identify partners in the community who are already working to address issues. Some of this work gets identified by asset mapping, which dives deeply into identifying community assets. Extractive knowledge frequently calls upon systemically underrepresented community members to highlight the deficits in their community and involves little collaboration. In doing so, it frames and limits what communities have to offer

epistemically and practically and substantially underestimates what communities do for themselves, in partnership with others, and what resources, epistemic and practical, they do have. An asset-based approach intentionally moves away from the practice of underestimating communities and builds together with communities from the range of assets they possess. Thus, starting from an asset-based approach is vital to building a solid foundation for transformational and epistemically just partnerships.

## Social Capital

Social capital, the second Practice Principle, in its most basic form, results from accepted informal norms that foster “cooperation between two or more individuals” (Fukuyama 1999 p.1). In particular, these are norms that promote cooperation in groups and are connected to values such as reciprocity, honoring commitments, truthfulness, and fulfilling duties that one has committed to. The rich development of social capital within communities and between organizations and individuals can result in trustful and reciprocal relationships necessary for community collaboration and strengthening. Unlike extractive relationships that have a low level of, if any, reciprocity, social capital building is inherently relational and reciprocal. Relationship building is vital for how the Fitz Center engages communities, and these relationships must be trustful and reciprocal. The Fitz Center and the communities we engage move forward most effectively when there is a shared commitment to the best interests of all entities involved. One example to strengthen reciprocity among partnerships is to recognize community partners as co-producers of knowledge, both with our students and in our research, build into funding opportunities stipends for community members, actively involve them in outcome deliberations on courses and projects, include them as co-authors on publications, develop community fellows models where community members are embedded in university centers, and develop a reciprocal model in which faculty and graduate students are embedded in partner organizations.

## Constructive Public Conversations

One significant role the Fitz Center plays in the community is that of a convener. In this role, the Fitz Center seeks to foster constructive public dialogue through balanced inquiry while centering the voices of historically and systemically minoritized communities. As David Ehrlichman emphasizes in Impact Networks: Create Connection, Spark Collaboration, and Catalyze Systemic Change (2021), “[w]ho is part” of a convening and network is as “just important, if not more important, than why” the convening and network exist (p.105).

In the Fitz Center, the convergence of our Marianist values with our Practice Principles requires that systemically minoritized voices have priority in dialogue and place. Without the other practice principles, this could result in extractive knowledge. However, the principles provide “guard rails” that shape the relationship’s intentionality, reciprocity, and mutuality. At the same

time, the Marianist values prioritize the goals and needs of systemically minoritized communities over potentially more powerful organizations, including the Fitz Center. The work is thus attentive to power. From the Fitz Center's end, this means that: a.) We seek to understand more than we seek to be understood, b.) We act with epistemic humility, c.) We leverage public support with the community for community-identified goals, and d.) As much as we practice radical hospitality in having space built into the Fitz Center for community collaborative dialogues, we also actively work to be out in spaces for public dialogue that our community partners find valuable.

The importance of this approach is emphasized in “The Front Porch Gathering as a Compassionate Classroom,” which argues for and demonstrates the importance of “front porch dialogues” in community spaces to act with reciprocity, to value community expertise, and to shape authentic and robust public dialogue (Gururaj et al. 2023). As is reiterated throughout “Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices” (2023), “building trustful relationships through honest conversations about the goals of the community and the capacity of community partners, faculty, staff, and students” (p.23) is essential for anti-racist, and as we would argue, also non-extractive, community engagement. When we don't engage in authentic and honest conversations, the result harms communities, fragmentation, and the erosion of trust, shared values, and relationships. Trust is the bedrock of moving forward with impactful community engagement.

## Adaptive Capacity

While adaptive capacity is primarily connected to how communities respond to climate change, the term has a long history in the Fitz Center. Adaptive capacity in community engagement is an inherently participatory and reflective process. The ability of a community to collectively adapt to conditions is maximized when they prioritize learning together, seeking new information, co-producing knowledge, engaging in solution generation, and making ongoing change through the process to continue meeting identified outcomes or to readjust outcomes given new information. This emphasis on the co-production of knowledge and collectivity can protect against the harms of extractive knowledge. It requires continually examining the implications of one's work and the work of the partnerships. Adaptive capacity requires a high level of epistemic humility, i.e., a willingness to assess, be attentive to, and acknowledge the gaps in one's individual, institutional, or collective knowledge (Medina 2013). Without epistemic humility, it is impossible for collaboratives to be adaptive because epistemic arrogance creates individual, institutional, and collective rigidity and is maladaptive. Given the potential challenges identified by Ahmed's study (2016), which include “adjustments of plan” related to community-academic partnerships and the “sustainability” of the project and those that we have identified in this article, adaptive capacity is vital practice needed to address the likelihood of challenges and changes that will occur with university-community partnerships (p.55).

Returning to the example of student coursework in the previous section of the paper, we frequently hear that community partners, such as neighborhood associations, are excited by the planning work student course projects will do with them but that they are left with plans and not the ability or support to implement them when the semester is over. The challenge here is that while community partners typically appreciate the time and intellectual resources of the students and faculty members, these partners feel let down that the next steps are not a deeper partnership with the students, faculty members, or the university. An example of adaptive capacity in higher education is that as courses are initially being shaped, faculty could and should co-plan with other campus constituents, such as their centers for community engagement, or with other faculty, staff, and students as well as the community partners, for work to continue after the semester is over. Ideally, the partnerships would continue until the work is complete or until the partner is positioned to take over the project fully. This puts the partnership, as well as the outcomes for partners and students, at the center of the work. At a minimum, this co-planning and openness to adaptation would allow for transition planning for student work with community partners. While this may not be the typical way higher education is structured, higher education can adapt to have the capacity to work with community partners in ways that they identify as valuable.

## Widely Shared Vision

The Fitz Center believes a collective community vision is more powerful than any individual vision. The community's voice should always be central in co-creating new systems and solutions. Creating, reflecting, and acting on a widely shared vision focuses on action. There is shared power and commitment to this vision, where all parties are committed to enacting this vision together. There are many variables at play, and it can be difficult to maintain a widely shared vision. Still, when combined with the other principles, community-driven change can occur. Cultivating a widely shared vision is essential for co-created impact. When we ask ourselves, “‘What is possible?’ and ‘How do we create it [together]?’ people are mobilized to focus on transformational change” (Ehrlichman, p. 93). Open communication, an awareness of internal and external power dynamics, and critical reflection can all help ensure that a widely shared vision is created and maintained. Community engagement that keeps a widely shared vision at heart ensures that knowledge and power are shared and works toward transformational outcomes rather than knowledge being extractive.

Through these principles and best practices for community engagement, the Fitz Center seeks to form transformational partnerships that share power. When the approach is grounded in assets, social capital is developed, constructive conversations are had, space and humility are present for adaptive capacity, and all members of the partnerships are invested in a shared community vision, we believe it can safeguard against the challenges of extractive knowledge. These

practices shift the lens from the higher education institution to communities, thus putting communities at the front of community engagement. Community engagement frameworks are no longer built on student growth and knowledge acquisition as the highest goal. They are now embedded within communities that have responsibilities toward mutually beneficial and reciprocal outcomes.

While this approach shifts the focus away from students and faculty and to communities, it also still more deeply advances student learning and outcomes. It does so because this shift deepens students' skills in their engagement with communities and increases their knowledge and opportunities for robust engagement. Furthermore, for faculty and staff, it creates more responsible research partnerships and learning, which creates more responsible and informed research and learning outcomes that can't result from extractive and transactional relationships. Like much of what we know about justice-oriented work, we create better outcomes for all when we create equity for systemically minoritized communities and prioritize transformational relationships. An example of a transformative approach, embodying the Fitz Center Practice Principles, can be found in the Fitz Center's new Health Equity Program.

### **“Moving at the Speed of Trust:” The Formation of the Health Equity Program**

In this section, we demonstrate, through a case example, how the Practice Principles and Robert Wood Johnson's guiding principles are implemented to facilitate the convening of community and university members to co-create a program that would address community-identified needs. Through every step of co-creation, there was consideration and deference towards community members as knowers, thus allowing us to evaluate this process with a critical lens to define epistemically just processes and to create a program that will have a positive social impact. Carla Fehr (2021), in “Doing Things with Case Studies,” describes the distinction between *identifying* and *addressing* research presented in case examples by university members. Fehr (2021) describes the limits of “orthodox knowledge production practices” (p.154) that are often upheld and disseminated by academic philosophers with little to no intention of turning that knowledge into action items that will have a positive social impact. She argues that knowledge production deriving from case studies often stays within academic contexts, presenting ethical and epistemic challenges. In this way, our purpose for presenting a case example is twofold: To demonstrate the process by which we implement our Practice Principles to inform the way we engage the community responsibly to demonstrate the imperative presented by Fehr (2021) that the knowledge shared within case studies does something to create actual social change within the communities by which the knowledge derives.

The power of transformative approaches to community engagement that move through the Fitz Center's Practice Principles can be seen in the Fitz Center's Health Equity program with its focus on systems change as well as on impacting immediate harm. The Health Equity Program

combines a student cohort program and the Health Equity Activation Think Tank. While we will frame out both parts of the program, we will dive more deeply into the Health Equity Activation Think Tank (HEATT).

In August of 2021, Nancy McHugh became the new executive director of the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. Coming into that role, she expressed a commitment to shaping Fitz Center programs with equity as an outcome and a foundation for starting the center's work. In her meetings with community partner organizations, it became clear that there was a strong desire for collective work around health equity and a noted lack of health practitioners in our region who worked from a health equity lens. Partner organizations, which not only serve historically and systemically minoritized communities but are also founded and run by members of these communities, asked to initially convene to discuss Daniel Dawes's The Political Determinants of Health (2020) to understand how political and social determinants of health drive health outcomes.

With a group of roughly twenty-five community members and several University of Dayton faculty and staff, the group met regularly to discuss the book as well as to discuss how to impact inequitable health outcomes in Dayton and Montgomery County. While there are many significant health inequities in our region and many drivers of these, the health inequity that the collective expressed the most concern about is the high rate of Black infant and maternal mortality in Montgomery County. Montgomery County has the highest rate of Black infant mortality in Ohio and one of the highest rates of Black infant mortality in the US, with a Black infant mortality rate of 13.6 deaths per 1000 births, compared to white infants 5.1 per 1000 births in 2020 (Infant Mortality Score Card Ohio). Comparatively, the national average for 2020 was 5.4 deaths of infants per 1000, with 10.9 deaths per 1000 for Black infants. Similarly high in our region is Black maternal mortality and Black maternal morbidity, a health event that could have resulted in death but didn't. Montgomery County had the highest Black maternal mortality rate in the state from 2008 through 2016 at 19.7; the state rate is 14.7. Black maternal morbidity is highest in Ohio metropolitan counties and in Black women (Bureau of Vital Statistics Ohio Department of Health 2021). The collective expressed grave concerns that while many organizations recognized the inequity and were working on impacting Black infant and maternal mortality, there was little improvement in numbers, and Montgomery County was still the deadliest county in the state to be a Black baby and a Black mother.

The collective also identified the lack of health equity-minded, culturally competent health professionals in our region to impact the health outcomes and a lack of Black and Brown health professionals whose experiences are more likely to connect with racially minoritized communities in Dayton, a formerly redlined and hyper-segregated city. Furthermore, research shows that Black and Brown patients are more likely to have better health outcomes when treated by a doctor whose race matches the patient's (Boyle, 2023). Thus, in addition to what can

be done to increase Black infant and maternal vitality, the collective asked what can be done to increase the number of Black and Brown health professionals in Dayton to have a long-term impact on the health outcomes of racially minoritized communities.

The collective gave the Fitz Center a mandate to reach out further to other partner organizations and community members, to come back with plans to impact Black infant and maternal mortality and to increase the number of health-equity-minded health professionals in Dayton. Following our Practice Principles, we engaged in asset mapping of Dayton and Montgomery County. We connected more closely with organizations, such as Dayton Children’s Hospital Health Equity Center, Miami Valley Child Development Center, Dayton and Montgomery County Public Health, and Moms 2 Be, to understand what they saw as vital strategies, unmet needs, and strategies needing reassessment.

From this work emerged the Health Equity Activation Think Tank (HEATT), a collaborative out of the Fitz Center but run by a paid volunteer, Sharon Hawkins, funded by The Dayton Foundation. Hawkins is a former nursing professor, former Cleveland Clinic nurse, and health equity practitioner, who, in her retirement, is devoting her time to directing HEATT. The shape of HEATT was developed by further conversations that Hawkins had with mothers who have lost babies, with doulas, and a broad swath of community members. After an open public dialogue in February of 2023 that included doulas, birth mothers, medical professionals, public health practitioners, faculty, and a broad range of differently situated community members, HEATT began their work in late March 2023. Of the nineteen HEATT members, five are doulas, two are lactation specialists, and many are mothers who have given birth. Some are mothers who have lost infants. There is an ObGyn who specializes in Black infant and maternal vitality, a representative from the Greater Dayton Hospital Association, two representatives from Dayton and Montgomery County Public Health, three faculty, and a health equity expert from Dayton Children’s Hospital Health Equity Center. Some members are experienced in community organizing, food accessibility, literacy, and mental health support. The majority of HEATT members are Black and female. The group determined that their priorities are:

1. Exploring and creating awareness around race bias and equity practices in healthcare.
2. Analyzing research and utilizing evidence-based solutions that have been effective in other regions and shaping them for impact in Dayton.
3. Understanding, analyzing, and utilizing data, including at the neighborhood level.
4. Changing the narrative and mental models around Black infant and maternal mortality.
5. Moving forward legislation to impact Black infant and maternal mortality.
6. Increasing the impact of doulas.

From this emerged a decision to start with priorities 1-3 by forming three action groups, each responsible for research, solution generation, and implementation planning on their priority. While as Hawkins states, “We are moving at the speed of trust,” HEATT is moving. Significant

outcomes include gathering Black doulas to determine their priorities and what support from HEATT and connection to HEATT they would like to have. From these conversations, it was decided that they wanted ongoing engagement with HEATT, and HEATT would fund the certification and training of ten Black Doulas. Furthermore, HEATT actively worked to get a member of HEATT on the new State of Ohio Doula Board. We put forward two doulas from HEATT and had one of these appointed to the State of Ohio Doula Board. We also created what we lovingly call a “pocket doula,” an infographic with the questions a doula would ask if she was with a pregnant mother at a doctor’s visit. Doulas on HEATT led this charge, with many members adding to it. It was then shared with a group of women in a Moms 2 Be program supported by one of the doulas who is a HEATT member. We revised the infographic in light of the feedback from the women in that program. We are beginning to distribute the infographic through our doula networks and other locations and channels that engage pregnant mothers, such as local food markets. Moreover, Sharon Hawkins was invited to be a member of the Community Action Team for Fetal Infant Mortality Review at Public Health of Dayton and Montgomery County, which positions her and HEATT well to impact Black infant mortality in our region. Many HEATT members have stated that this is the first time they have felt like there is the potential to impact Black infant and maternal mortality.

The other mandate from the initial collective was to develop a strategy to increase the number of health equity-minded health professionals in our region and for them to more closely resemble the lives and experiences of systemically minoritized communities in Dayton and Montgomery County. In response, the Fitz Center developed a three-year student cohort program called the Health Equity Fellows. The program recruits a cohort of 10-15 University of Dayton first-year students each year committed to working in a health-related field, with 30-45 students in the program when it reaches full capacity. Our target population for student recruitment to the Health Equity Fellows Program is racially and economically minoritized college students from neighborhoods in our region. Fitz Center programs are free to University of Dayton students accepted into the programs, and all of our programs provide a stipend to students to enable their participation. The Health Equity Fellows Program stipend is greater than that for our other cohort programs because these students typically have greater financial need, and a goal is to ensure their ability to focus on the program as a vital part of their academic experience.

Similarly, student internships are paid internships as financial need is one of the biggest barriers to low-income students’ participation in internship experiences. We “equity-base” these internships so that each student receives \$14,200 a year for their 11-month internship. This allows students who would not typically be able to engage in an internship experience due to the need to work to pay for their education and housing to have their internship be a source of funding. Furthermore, in their internships, students are placed at sites that both require and have the capacity to support the student intern; many of these are our partner organizations that were deeply involved in forming this program. To develop a regional pipeline for students into the



program, we are planning for summer health equity intensives/academies for high school students from Dayton and Montgomery County to prepare students for success in health fields and make them competitive for applying to the program and to the University of Dayton.

Thus, in addition to addressing local health equity needs and developing students as health equity advocates, a primary goal of the Health Equity Fellows Program is creating robust, enduring opportunities and relationships for students through this program such that when they go on to medical school, to graduate school in public health, or to law school for health law or policy, Health Equity Fellow alums choose to return to Montgomery County to launch their careers. The outcome would be to contribute to a larger systemic change in Dayton and Montgomery County, Ohio, by having a strong, equity-minded health workforce that more closely resembles the communities it serves and is positioned to impact health inequities in our region. The first cohort of students started the Fall semester of 2023, and we met our recruitment goals of having the majority of the students from systemically minoritized communities. Many of the students in this program come into the program with lived experience of health inequities and a knowledge base of what equitable health outcomes look like. They are co-creators of learning and knowledge with our community partners and our director in health equity work and reshaping health equity outcomes. As argued by Reiff and Risam, anti-racist community engagement, and we would argue transformative community engagement, “features collaborative learning that builds on the cultural wealth of minoritized students and creates space for their knowledge and expertise to be applied to problem-solving in communities, without looking at them as ‘informant’” (2023 p. 247).

It is worth noting that neither HEATT nor the Health Equity Fellows Program would have developed without engaging in a transformative Fitz Center Practice Principles approach. What is additionally vital is that the Fitz Center has received over a million dollars in funding for these programs, none of which goes to salaries or staffing. All this goes to student support and support for HEATT solution and implementation work to impact Black infant and maternal mortality.

## **Reciprocal Relationships**

While the Fitz Center does serve in a convening role in our region, transformative relationships also demand that we engage not only as conveners in our community but also as active members of work convened by other organizations. Our relationship with Omega Community Development Corporation is an example of the depth to which we engage in this sort of role. Omega CDC’s mission is to break “the cycle of intergenerational poverty by catalyzing change in Northwest Dayton by focusing on education, economic stability, health and well-being, and community” (<https://omega-cdc.org/about/>). They work through a two-generation/whole-family model, engaging whole families to move families out of poverty in ways that these families identify as valuable. The Fitz Center was already actively engaged with Omega CDC by having

our students in long-term placements in two schools that Omega CDC serves, interns placed at Omega, and Nancy McHugh serving on the board of Omega CDC. Furthermore, several Fitz Center Faculty Fellows have active, ongoing projects with Omega CDC, projects that were identified as priorities by community members (see Rizvi July 2023).

In early 2023, Omega CDC was awarded almost \$29 million in funding from the federal government's Promise Neighborhood initiative to launch the Hope Zone Promise Neighborhood (HZP). Omega CDC reached out to the Fitz Center to ask for our engagement with HZP, and we were excited and honored to participate in this vital work. Of the five work groups that Omega has moved forward as part of the Hope Zone Promise Neighborhood work, Fitz Center team members are represented on four: backbone, education, community engagement, and health and wellness. While these working groups have only been active for a couple of months, they have had almost one hundred community members join the workgroups. While the Fitz Center team members represent only a small portion of these work groups, showing up, being present, and engaging is vital for trustful, reciprocal, transformative relationships.

## **Conclusion**

While extractive relationships provide a quick way to do community engagement and allow faculty and universities to check a box that they are “community engaged,” they do not foster relationships with and between communities or result in community-driven change. They also reinforce what students frequently already believe about historically and systemically minoritized communities. In this way, institutions and individuals are allowed to underestimate the efficacy of these communities as well as their assets, epistemic and practical. Furthermore, extractive work is fast, while non-extractive work takes time and a willingness to invest one's time and the organization's time. It requires work not driven by semesters and showing up individually and institutionally in ways that are not always convenient to the academic schedule. The relationships have to be intentionally sustained over time. Our health equity work took a year and a half to launch. It requires year-round work and commitment, including the work and commitment of the faculty involved. Suppose higher education institutions authentically want to prioritize community engagement. In that case, this requires that we challenge ourselves to move away from the practices, models, timelines, and frameworks convenient to us and instead shape these in ways that meet what communities tell us they need. Until we do so, extractive relationships, including the developed thin relationships and the distrust fostered among the community, will continue to be the norm in higher education community engagement.

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