

The Lived Experience-Engaged Ladder

A lived experience engaged organization and or project is one where people with lived experience contribute to the success of the organization/project in meaningful ways. A fully lived experience organization and or project has a vibrant partnership between clinicians, administrators, peers and people with lived experience (service recipients) in order to identify and meet the needs of people they serve, innovate to meet emerging needs, and reduce barriers to success.

The Lived Experience-Engaged Ladder is built on the concepts first outlined in Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) where UNICEF sought to better define how they were involving the people they were seeking to serve in the design, implementation, and evaluation of all of its programs.

This tool is intended to encourage organizations and or projects to go through a self-assessment and act intentionally to more fully integrate people with the experience of living with their own behavioral health condition or as a parent of a child under the age of 18 living with a behavioral health condition into the development, implementation, and evaluation of their organization's or project's program policies and procedures.

By involving people with the lived experience in all aspects of the organization's life, the system is better able to offer high quality and effective programs, policies, and procedures that meet the needs of those they are seeking to serve.

While it may help point the way, the Lived Experience-Engaged Organization Ladder is not intended to define a career ladder for peer support staff or those with lived experience receiving services. It is designed as a self-assessment tool for organizations, programs and or projects to rethink how they include consumers in all aspects of the organization so that the organization can be effective in meeting its mission.

The Lived Experience Engaged Ladder:



The Lived Experience-Engaged Assessment

Every organization/project will have a mixture of things they do that might be best described by different rungs on the ladder. For example, an organization/project may be able to describe themselves on rung eight and still be doing things at rung one. There is nothing wrong with having a mixture of ways people with lived experience are engaged in the organization/project. Not every person with lived experience or peer will have the experience to contribute at rung seven and may be more comfortable developing those skills through volunteer activities at rung two. However, a review of where your organization or project primarily and consistently lands on the ladder can point out areas for growth and lead to strategically improving your success as a lived experience engagement.

Step One: Take a moment think about your project and project partners, work together and place check marks next to the corresponding rung on the ladder as follows as it pertains to your Learning Lab Project:

- ✓✓✓ We do this consistently
- ✓✓ We can point to a few instances where we have done this
- ✓ We have done this on a rare occasion
- No check mark means we have never done this

Step Two: Jot down an example that illustrates your check marks in each area

Levels	Check Marks	Illustration
9. Consumers Contributing at all Levels		
8. Consumers in Leadership		
7. Consumer-Initiated Partnerships		
6. Consumer Input and Influence, No Leadership		
5. Separate but Equal		
4. Input, No Influence		
3. Job Tokenism		
2. Tokenism		
1. Marketing Capital and Entertainment		

Step Three: Now take a moment and consider where most of your check marks are placed. Do you see any patterns? Are most of your check marks in the green, yellow or orange zones? What does it mean?

Step Four: What specific strategies could you implement to improve the lived experience engagement orientation of your organization/project?