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# Community Voice and the Coatesville Black Media Renaissance

Summary of an Evaluation of Community Inclusivity as Demonstrated by the Coatesville Black Media Renaissance Initiative

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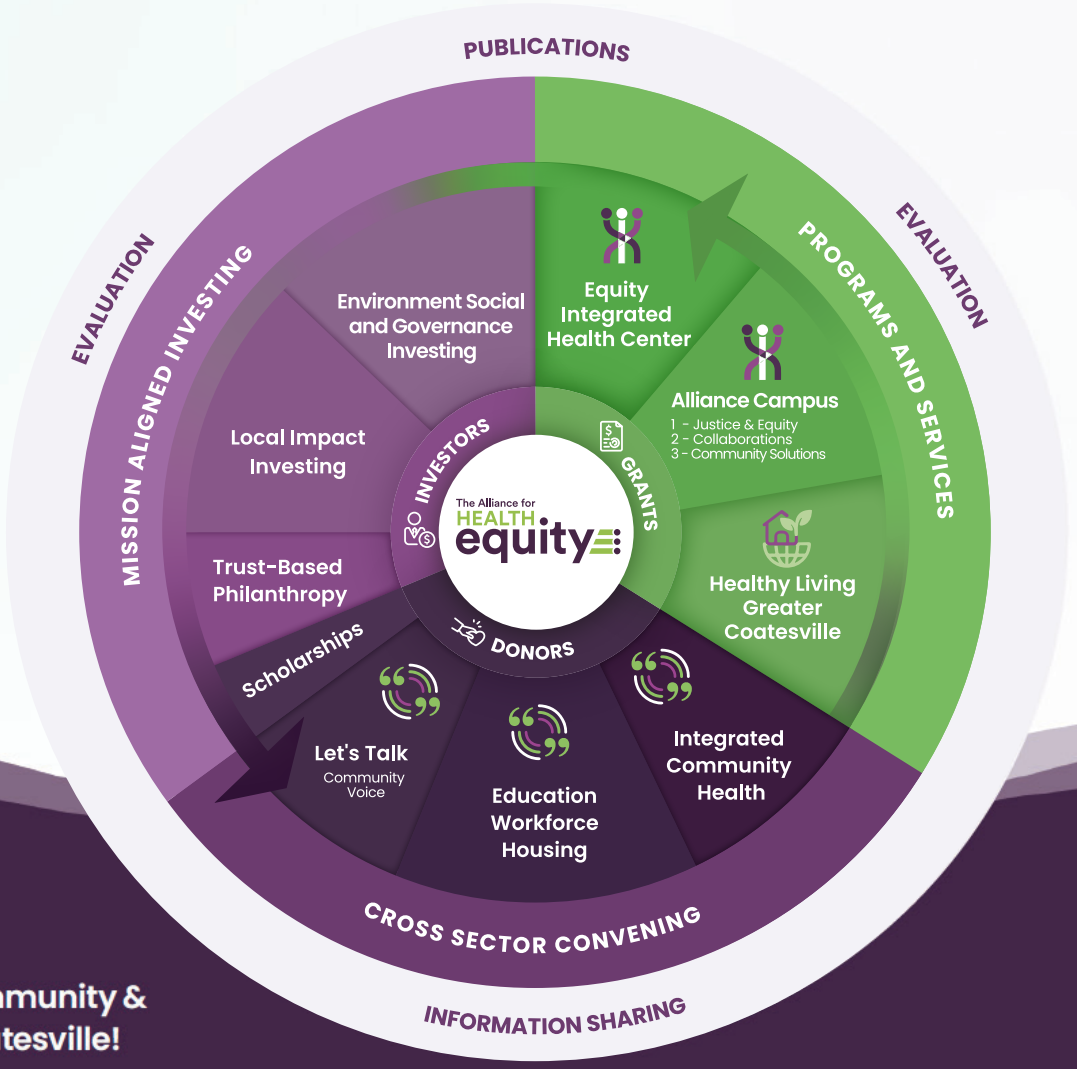


The Alliance for HEALTH equity
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**Harnessing the Power of Community & Partnership for a Greater Coatesville!**

Written by Sarah Ragsdale and Jean Marie Carroll and compiled from an evaluation report by Sarah Ragsdale

## Special Thanks

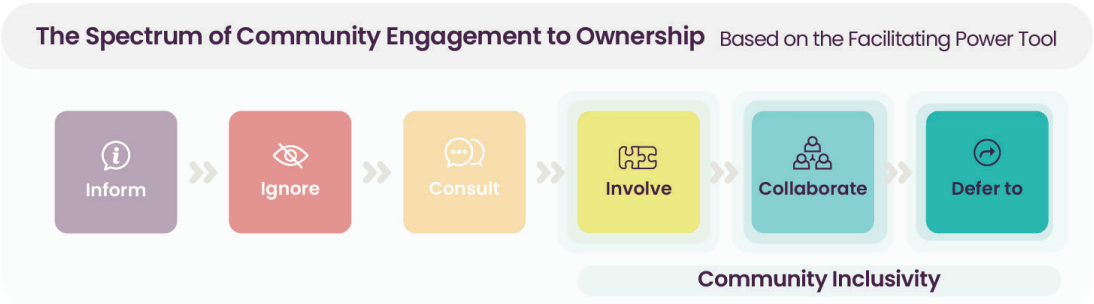
The Coatesville Black Media Renaissance team: Michele Allen, Kevin Davis, Shanina Dionna, Pete Foster, Ajené Livingston, Teresa Smith, Heather Myers, Alphonso (Fonz) Newsuan, Ebony Roberts, Tammy Dowley-Blackman (Consultant)

# COMMUNITY VOICE AND THE COATESVILLE BLACK MEDIA RENAISSANCE

*Summary of an Evaluation of Community Inclusivity as Demonstrated by the Coatesville Black Media Renaissance Initiative*

This report honors the tremendous efforts of the Coatesville Black Media Renaissance (CBMR) team as they have used their talents, skills, and passions to uplift voices in their community. It also reflects the efforts of The Alliance for Health Equity (The Alliance) in supporting an initiative that seeks out and celebrates the strengths of their community as assets to the overall mission of a "more equitable, resilient, and healthy community for all residents of the Greater Coatesville area".[1] Specifically, this narrative focuses on Community Voice as a value for The Alliance. It includes a retrospective assessment of the CBMR initiative. CBMR is a fiscally sponsored project of The Alliance and provides an example of incorporating Community Voice into the process of co-creating solutions. For these reasons, CBMR was the first initiative to be evaluated for community inclusivity by The Alliance.

The Alliance's guiding principles are stewardship, equity, leadership, collectiveness, inclusiveness, innovation, accountability, and community engagement.[2] The Alliance focuses on community-based solutions to address complex social and health challenges. Its intent is to provide a community-inclusive approach where stakeholders can co-create initiatives and investments that strive to develop substantive solutions for complex health, social, and economic conditions.[3] As a value of The Alliance, Community Voice is the goal that seeks to "involve, collaborate, and defer to" the community as partners for the co-planning of initiatives and community-driven processes. This is described in Facilitating Power's *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*.[4]




## Coatesville Black Media Renaissance (CBMR)

COATESVILLE
BLACK MEDIA RENAISSANCE

*(Logo created by KTB Graphics)*

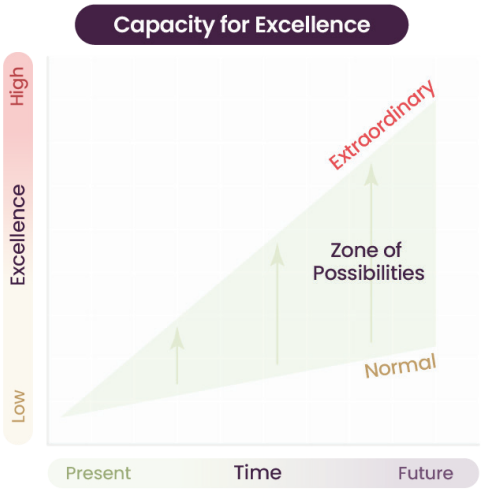
CBMR was launched in 2020 and provides a vehicle for local artists and artisans to amplify important social issues impacting Coatesville. Working as a team of 9 local arts and media activists, they use art to influence media narratives through print, mural art, design, film and spoken word.[5] By emphasizing the voices of the Black community, CBMR provides the platform to uplift Community Voices to address complex social, economic, and health issues.

Since their initiation, the group has organized a variety of activities in the community including the Coatesville Showcase Event and panels on topics such as mental health, education, and the economy.

1 The Alliance, Home, Web
2 The Alliance, Mission Vision Values, Web
3 The Alliance, CEO Message, Web
4 González, p.2
5 The Alliance, CBMR, Web

CBMR created the Youth Voices Project and made partnerships with other community organizations such as the Coatesville Youth Initiative (CYI). An assessment of the group's best experiences provides insights into future opportunities for CBMR to demonstrate the successes of community-inclusive initiatives.

## Research Methodology




This assessment uses theory and practice in the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). POS explores the study of positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members. POS encourages an organizational culture that flourishes, resulting in "extraordinary" results in excellence, rather than a "normal" trajectory.[6]

The assessment methodology, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), is based in POS. AI guides the interview process as it focuses on organizational goals, specifically as it relates to incorporating community voices. POS with methodology in AI was used to perform 10 CBMR individual interviews and 3 discussion groups. Findings from these interviews and discussion groups included the highlights from community-inclusive experiences and recommendations for a revised model for the community voice theory of change.

> **"When people focus on human ideals and achievements, peak experiences, and best practices, these things – not the conflicts – tend to flourish."** [7]

Data from the interviews and discussion groups included recorded interviews, transcripts, and notes. Qualitative and quantitative analysis was performed on the interview data. Interviews and discussion groups were assessed for themes and outstanding quotes that support each of these themes. Eighteen (18) main themes were categorized into 5 theme groups. The quantitative analysis and supporting quotes provided evidence for the prominence of the themes. These themes were ultimately used to identify potential strategic opportunities and recommendations that provide support for inclusive community-driven processes. This analysis reinforced the overarching opportunity of empowering stakeholders to uplift community voices through practices in internal dynamics and approach to the community.

**A SAMPLING OF QUOTES FROM CBMR INTERVIEWS:**

Two of the most prominent themes were **language/communication** and **group dynamics**.

A common communication concern that can inhibit the inclusion of others is captured here:

> ***"too often the people that don't know how to articulate and express themselves are not given the space to be acknowledged"*** *(language/communication theme)*

Interviewees also recognized the challenges that can surface in progressing with projects when working within a group of individuals full of their own unique ideas:

> ***"when people in the community are used to working hard doing things on their own and not used to having to ask people or talk to people or confirm, get permission, so...some growing pains around those kinds of things"*** *(group dynamics theme)*

6 As shown in chart recreated from Dutton and Spreitzer, 2014, p. 3

7 Mohr and Watkins, 2002

## Opportunities and Recommendations

Three strategic opportunities for the future of Community Voice for Greater Coatesville are presented in this report and have applicability to groups and organizations in general. These opportunities align with The Alliance's mission and are accompanied by recommendations for consideration.

| Strategic Opportunity | #1 Internal Dynamics: Empowering CBMR Members to Uplift Community Voices | #2 Approach to the Community: Empowering the Community to Use their Voices | #3 Evolving the Evaluation Process |
|---|---|---|---|
| Focus | Empower the CBMR team through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to strengthen collaborative leadership, encourage the best culture of creativity, and communicate the community collective vision, values, and voices. | Encourage community inclusivity by implementing effective communication strategies; providing tools and training to facilitate growth; and by expanding AI processes that instill a sense of feeling valued. | Ensure Community Voice remains a value and is measured in initiatives that impact community residents |
| Recommendations | Practicing Collaborative Leadership through AI:<br>• Discovering and dreaming together<br>• Designing for a culture of creativity that flourishes<br>• Considering an AI summit for members of the group or organization | • Community inquiry with an "appreciative" approach<br>• Apprenticeships and training<br>• Leveraging Positive Communication for language and outreach<br>  ◦ Minimize language barriers<br>  ◦ Develop an inclusive web platform | • Incorporating a diversity of stakeholder interviews<br>• Evolving the group discussion<br>• Expanding outreach<br>• Experiential learning and re-evaluation |

## Appreciative Inquiry Process

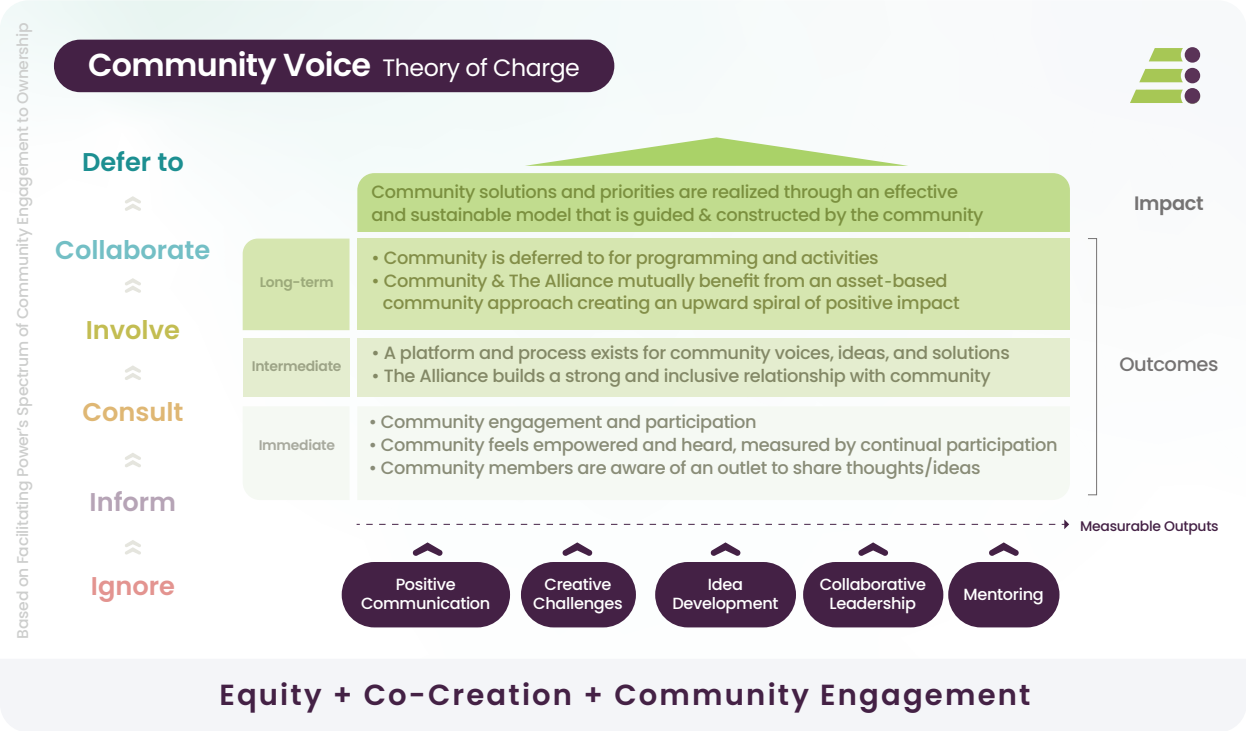
While AI was used in research methodology, it was also leveraged in the recommendations to encourage best organizational practices. AI may be used to support internal dynamics of CBMR or any other organization. Likewise, community leaders may apply these processes over time through team-building exercises and practice. Capacity building may also be extended in the form of effective communication, training, and mentorships which also expand opportunities for new voices and community leadership to surface.

AI 4-D Cycle[8]

8 Recreated from Cooperrider, Web

## Community Voice Theory of Change

Building upon the findings and resulting opportunities, a theory of change model was designed.




This model depicts a Community Voice value that incorporates other values and priorities of The Alliance related to equity, co-creation, and community engagement. The recommended input activities include:

- practicing mutual positive communication between the organization and the community
- posing creative challenges for the community
- facilitating the development of community ideas
- practicing collaborative leadership with and within the community
- providing mentorship for community capacity building

Measurable outputs can be identified from these input activities. The resulting outcomes for the immediate, intermediate, and long-term future fall along the Facilitating Power's The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership. The desired impact is more community inclusivity that is closest to the "defer to" goal where "community solutions and priorities are realized through an effective and sustainable model that is guided and constructed by the community".

## Conclusion

While much of this report has focused on the processes that encourage community inclusivity, these processes are made possible by the resources that facilitate them. Encouraging Community Voice to flourish depends upon the ability to incorporate both actions and resources. These resources include financial support for programming and outreach as well as consistent meeting times, locations, and event spaces for Community Voice initiatives. The tools that allow for a diversity of voices to be uplifted are crucial. As discovered in the CBMR assessment, these tools may include, but are not limited to, media equipment and multimedia platforms for presentations, discussions, and outreach.

This report has provided key findings from past experiences. It has also sparked ideas for building a more inclusive future. Seeking solutions to complex challenges such as “closing equity gaps” may be best addressed by facilitating a “collective vision” for “community ownership”.[9]

Importantly, an overarching theme that has also surfaced in this research is that the processes of answering these questions may, themselves, be one of co-creation, utilizing a strengths-based approach to community inclusivity.

The experiences of both, the CBMR team and The Alliance, demonstrate that incorporating Community Voice as a value requires a commitment to continually evolve and improve community-driven processes for inclusivity.

In closing, the reflection of one CBMR member highlights the potential growth of Community Voice as a value.

> ***"I think that was the original purpose...to try and get the community active and get the community using their voices and we did get a few, I think we did a good job, we did a GREAT job...I think we could do bigger, I think we could do more."***

9 González, p.6, referring to Facilitating Power’s reflection questions for community ownership

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