ACHs generally recognize the importance and benefits of engaging grassroots members of their communities to participate in ACH decisions and activities. Most have already taken steps to educate community members about what ACHs do and to get consumers’ feedback on what they should be doing. To be honest, though, implementing a robust consumer engagement plan takes time, effort and other resources (including funding). And, ACHs have varying needs and capacities to carry out different kinds of consumer engagement, depending on factors like their local demographics, the funding they can get from sources outside the Health Care Authority, and the institutional resources available to them from their backbone organizations and local partners. At the same time, more than ever, ACHs need to intensively engage grassroots members of their communities to help guide the decisions they are making about changing their structures and selecting waiver-funded projects. This can all seem daunting, as ACHs try to balance their individual needs for community engagement with the time and resources needed to implement specific engagement strategies, all with an eye to the approaching deadlines for making key decisions about the direction their ACH will be taking for the next few years.

With these considerations in mind, we’ve put together the following list of seven consumer engagement practices we recommend ACHs adopt and begin to implement as soon as possible. These practices will make it possible for ACHs to get the public involved in their work in a meaningful way that:

a) can be *implemented relatively quickly*;
b) is likely to have *high value for ACHs regardless of the ACH’s individual demographics* and other circumstances; and,
c) is *not likely to require short-term significant cash expenditures* to achieve, so that they are likely to be feasible even for ACHs with comparatively low outside funding levels.

### 7 High-Value, Low-Cost Consumer Engagement Practices ACHs Can Begin to Implement Right Now

1) Designate seats on your governing Board for grassroots consumers.

2) (Begin to) Recruit consumer Board members.

3) Give the public a chance to give feedback to your Board before each significant decision is made.

4) Assign responsibility for overseeing consumer engagement in your ACH to a specific work group or committee.

5) Create a written consumer engagement plan for your ACH.

6) Budget for consumer engagement.

7) Develop a “Road Show” to present at meetings of community organizations.

A discussion of the benefits of and some approaches to carrying out these practices follows.
What Can ACHs Do Now to Help Promote Consumer Engagement?

1) **DESIGNATE SEATS ON YOUR GOVERNING BOARD FOR GRASSROOTS CONSUMERS:** For ACHs that have not already incorporated as independent legal entities or that are not run as projects of their backbone organizations, this can likely be done at your next governing body’s meeting.\(^1\) For ACHs that are already forming nonprofit organizations or other independent corporate entities to take over their operations, it will be particularly helpful to include consumers in the initial slate of directors/members/etc. included when you file your articles of incorporation or similar founding documents. Washington nonprofit law does not require you to fix a set number of Directors for a nonprofit corporation when the nonprofit is founded. So, even if your ACH is ready to incorporate as a nonprofit but doesn’t have grassroots consumers ready to take seats on its Board, you can (and should consider) providing in your articles or bylaws for the ability to add seats to your initial slate of Directors without having to amend your organization’s governing documents. As noted before, it is critical that **at least two seats be provided for consumers on your Board**, or you create a serious risk that consumer Board members will feel tokenized, marginalized and discouraged from voicing their perspectives.

2) **(BEGIN TO) RECRUIT CONSUMER BOARD MEMBERS:** To have grassroots consumers participate in ACH decision-making about major changes to the ACH’s governing, operational and legal structures and about the waiver-funded projects the ACH selects, you will need to start recruiting consumers now. This may seem like a forbidding task. The ACH program, the proposed Medicaid waiver, and other subjects on which your governing board is going to be asked to make decisions in the near future can be hard to understand even for professionals who are well-schooled in our health care system. But, no business expects all of its Board members to be experts in the industry to which the business belongs. And, there are likely grassroots consumers in your community who are already advising different elements of the health care system and advocating for change. For example, many hospitals have patient advisory boards. Numerous BHOs have consumer advisory groups. Each FQHC has a governing board a majority of the members of which are generally low income patients. And, different community groups, like Washington CAN! and Puget Sound Sage provide training to members on health care advocacy. With relatively little effort, you should be able to **perform an inventory of organizations in your area that employ health care consumers as members of advisory or governing bodies or who have formalized trainings for grassroots members to advocate on health care or public benefits issues.** Reaching out to those groups alone may well yield more applicants for the consumer positions you have than there are openings. In the future, it is hoped that ACHs will adopt multi-tiered engagement strategies that will allow consumer leaders to be identified and trained through progressively closer work with their

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\(^1\) For ACHs that are operated entirely by a nonprofit organization, there may be provisions of their Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws that set out procedures to be followed for expanding Board membership and/or filling Board vacancies that may prevent new Board seats from being created so quickly.
ACHs. But, for the present, at least, it is likely that there are consumer health advocate resources in many communities that will offer educated and engaged grassroots advocates who will ably fill Board positions allocated for consumers.

3) **GIVE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC THE CHANCE TO PROVIDE ORAL AND WRITTEN FEEDBACK TO YOUR GOVERNING BODY BEFORE EACH SIGNIFICANT DECISION IS MADE:** This can be done in different ways. For example, the Cascade Pacific Action Alliance allows *any person* attending their governing body meetings to participate in the group’s discussions. Alternately, a time for public comment can be provided shortly before a vote is held on each issue being considered by the Board and towards the end of Board discussions of substantive issues not resulting in a vote. The important thing is for members of the public to be given a chance to offer feedback on *each significant issue at times at which commenters can benefit from the body’s discussion about the factors to be weighed in making the decisions in question and at which the governing body can give the feedback meaningful consideration before they make the decisions.*

4) **ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY FOR OVERSEEING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR ACH TO A SPECIFIC WORK GROUP OR COMMITTEE:** Consumer engagement is not rocket science, and many powerful consumer engagement practices will not require your ACH to pay for much if any services or materials beyond the staff time and overhead already factored into your budget. Consumer engagement does, however, require a commitment of time and effort from individuals and organizations interested in helping to promote it within your ACH. With the many responsibilities that ACHs are already required to shoulder, it’s easy for consumer engagement to be shunted aside by work in areas that are seen as being more pressing, if no one within your ACH’s broader structure is held accountable for making sure that consumer engagement planning and implementation actually takes place. Assigning this area of operations to a group allows for the easier sharing of diverse perspectives on how the work of engaging consumers to collaborate with other ACH partners can be carried out. It also makes it easier to leverage a larger pool of individuals (the community engagement work group’s membership) in service of your ACH’s consumer engagement planning, rather than relying mostly on a single CE manager. This strategy should also take little to no financial resources to implement\(^2\) and be easy to achieve at the next governing body meeting.

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\(^2\) Some ACHs that send staff to each work group meeting or that employ facilitators or other contractors to assist with running work groups might object that creating a new work group or expanding the brief of an existing one to address consumer engagement will certainly require the expenditure funds. We leave it to each ACH to decide how best to staff their work group meetings. However, there are ACH work groups that are chaired or facilitated by ACH partners at no expense to the ACH. This should be possible as well for consumer engagement. We invite ACHs to look how they can best make use of the existing resources that their partners can offer them to achieve important goals like consumer engagement.
What Can ACHs Do Now to Help Promote Consumer Engagement?

5) **CREATE A WRITTEN CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR ACH:** Even a relatively simple consumer engagement activity -- like holding a public meeting to introduce the ACH to community members -- requires advance planning and coordinating a number of actions by a group of individuals to complete successfully. And, no one thinks that a single community meeting will deliver the kind of consumer engagement that your ACH needs and that will offer the most benefit to your organization. The best way to ensure that you meet your ACH’s consumer engagement goals is to create a written plan that includes the following:

- **Goals** - Your ACH’s aims for consumer engagement; including both higher level and concrete goals will be helpful.
- **Methods** - The activities and other methods you plan to use to achieve you ACH’s consumer engagement aims.
- **Participating staff and partners** - Individuals and organizations that will be involved (or whose help will need to be sought) to carry out the listed activities.
- **Resources** – List the resources you think you’ll need to carry out the plan’s activities and their (proposed) source; if you don’t have (some of) these resources lined up yet, say how you hope to get them.
- **Timeline** – List dates for completing each activity included in the plan.

Creating a plan with this type of content will help organize your consumer engagement work and provide a means of accountability for reviewing how proposed consumer engagement activities were conducted. Like the practices listed above, putting together a consumer engagement plan should not require the outlay of significant funds to complete. To be clear, though, that doesn’t mean that it won’t require significant in-kind resources, particularly the work of the individuals who help draft the plan. But, those are exactly the kind of resources in which ACHs are rich – the willingness of members of their allied and partner organizations to research and develop policy proposals for the ACH to implement.

6) **BUDGET FOR CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT:** We all know that financial resources are tight for ACHs (and tighter for some than others). A lot of consumer engagement activities can be carried out with funds that are already budgeted (e.g., backbone organization staff’s time working on consumer engagement may be able to be paid for as part of your budget allocation for backbone staff compensation). Some consumer engagement activities, however, will likely require some additional expenditures (e.g., translating outward facing ACH materials into non-English languages, providing stipends to consumer Board members, etc.). Actively budgeting for consumer engagement ensures that funds are available for specific activities that can’t be neatly shoe-horned into your existing budget categories. It also makes it more likely that consumer engagement funding will be there when you need it. Perhaps most importantly, it will
help you plan your consumer engagement activities by giving you a more concrete idea of how much funding you have available for activities that carry a hard price tag

7) **DEVELOP A “ROAD SHOW” TO PRESENT AT MEETINGS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:** It’s great to invite consumers and leaders of community organizations to meetings and presentations that your ACH organizes. But, instead of just asking members of your community to come to you to learn about your ACH and give you feedback, you will likely be most effective at reaching grassroots consumers by going to speak and work with them at places near where they live and work that they already know. Consumers who are already involved with a nearby community organization may feel more comfortable and more easily able to attend a meeting there than they would feel going to an unfamiliar meeting location that is not near where they live at a meeting staffed by people they don’t know. You can make this easier by preparing a standard “road show” presentation about your ACH to deliver at meetings of community groups in your region. This presentation can then be adapted to the individual organization and community being addressed and can either be presented entirely by backbone and partner staff or together with leaders of the organization at which the presentation is being given. The presentations themselves may require some funding to deliver (e.g., for flyers advertising the event, interpreters, and food for the meetings), but that may be able to be shouldered by or shared with the organization at which you are presenting. But, preparing the standard presentation itself should not require any significant expenditures other than the time required to put it together.

**NEXT STEPS**

What steps your ACH takes in the medium to long term to promote consumer engagement will depend significantly on your individual ACH’s priorities, funding and the characteristics of your region. For example, some ACHs may want to form Community Advisory Councils, which have proved to be a successful means of harnessing consumer input in other health systems. ACHs that include multiple counties may choose to work with local community alliances that are already known to and more accessible to grassroots consumers in their communities than the central ACH administration and that can help serve as conduits of information between the ACH’s overarching governance structure and its widely separated and diverse communities.

Other activities are likely to (need to) be pursued by most ACHs. For example, ACHs will generally need to provide orientation and support to consumers who make a commitment to participating in ACH governing boards, work groups or other bodies. And, some ACH meetings and presentations will need to be conducted in a way that is accessible to community members who are not participating in them in a professional capacity (i.e., folks who are not employees of health and social service systems...
or advocacy groups who are working with ACHs as part of their jobs). This kind of support might include providing parking and/or transportation, serving food (at activities of any significant length), offering child care for parents who wish to participate, and holding meetings outside of normal business hours.

Northwest Health Law Advocates and Washington CAN! are available to consult with you at no charge on consumer engagement in ACHs, including developing public education materials and designing and putting on board orientations and community presentations on ACHs.

For more information, please contact us at

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