



## Community Feedback – Collaboration Continuum Survey and Strategic Refresh Meetings

**Background.** Between October and November 2021, we collected community feedback in two ways: the Collaboration Continuum Survey and the Strategic Refresh Community Meetings. The Collaboration Continuum survey, our second one after 2019, aimed to understand how stakeholders incorporate health-related practices in their field and whether they are actively collaborating with other sectors to ensure a multidisciplinary approach to health. The Strategic Refresh Community Meetings were two interactive Zoom sessions with some of our stakeholders. They gave us their input as we realign our goals and activities for the upcoming years. In both instances our community partners gave us valuable feedback on challenges and priorities for their organizations. The below summarizes some of the findings.

Our mission is *to connect, support, and inform efforts to improve the health of individuals and communities in Arizona*. We know this is not an easy task, so we wanted to hear from our community partners on what they think are the biggest challenges to achieving our mission and what we should keep in mind to be successful. This is what they said.

- **COVID-19.** Without an end in sight, COVID-19 continues to affect our day-to-day lives. Partners remind us that organizations are short staffed, financially strained, and, as a result, employees are overworked. To achieve our mission, we must keep in mind these challenges and continue to show flexibility in funding requirements and grant reporting. Relatedly, our partners also remind us of the importance of long-term financial support for organizational planning and stability. COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of wellness and health: now, more than ever, people are aware that health is determined by much more than a doctor's visit.
- **Lack of collaboration.** Partners shared their concern on the lack of communication across organizations and agencies. Those who are working on the same issues might be duplicating efforts and delaying efforts in achieving their goals because they are unaware of what other actors are doing in the same field. Moreover, some organizations might be aware on the similarities of their work, but still decide to work separately because of conflicting priorities.
- **Administrative challenges.** Vitalyst has a broad approach to improving health, but the needs in the state exceed the existing infrastructure and funds available. For a medium-size foundation, it might be difficult to tackle the extensive needs that exist statewide. We must prioritize our work using an equity lens and by focusing on the most pressing needs.
- **Community engagement.** In order to create real change, it's important to create meaningful engagement with the communities with whom we work. Our community partners want us to continue to be aware of some of the racist and long-standing power dynamics that have existed between philanthropy and community-based organizations. Partners remind us that we also need to be aware of the different needs between urban and rural populations. We must approach our work by centering community voice and making sure it is heard in every step of what we do. Healing must be a focus by using trauma-informed practices.

A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH



- **Political environment.** Bringing together different actors across the political spectrum to agree on policy change is not an easy task. The current political structures, fear of changing the status quo, and losing public civility are real difficulties when dealing with policy change. In order to be successful, we must remember to create effective and compelling messaging for both sides of the political spectrum and educate newly appointed lawmakers on key issues affecting communities. Our partners remind us to continue the work, however difficult it might be, and never lose sight of the changes that are needed to improve our communities: “Vitalyst is a changemaker institution [...] don’t shy away from the edge”.

**So, given these challenges what can we do?** We asked our partners what additional type of support they would like to see from Vitalyst. We summarized their responses and grouped them in 4 different areas: Foster Collaboration, Financial Support, Leveraging Data, Policy Change, and Capacity Building.

- **Foster collaboration.** Our partners want our support in connecting them to other organizations, so that they can learn from each other, amplify their impact, and grow together. They want to increase collaboration by bringing together experts from different fields who are working on the same issue. For instance, they want to reduce duplication of work and coordinate efforts of rural funders, possibly by “creating a tool or common platform to determine and share impact”.
- **Financial Support.** One of the most popular requests by stakeholders has been that of multi-year, unrestricted general funds. Organizations, particularly newer, smaller ones, need economic security for long-term strategic planning, operational programming, and staffing. With this security, they would be able to focus more on the community they serve and less on the administrative aspects of managing an organization.
- **Leveraging Data.** Our stakeholders want to get better at analyzing data and using it for their strategic planning. Many of them want help understanding state and local demographics and assessing where the racial disparities are. They are also interested in learning how to use data for evaluation purposes and showing the impact of their work.
- **Policy Change.** Organizations want Vitalyst’s support in learning how to achieve policy change. They want to learn more about how to influence decisionmakers and build better connections with their city and county officials.
- **Capacity Building.** Organizations want to learn more about the specific skills that are needed to run their day-to-day operations. They have expressed interest in courses on grant writing, public relations, and strategic planning.