

Mary Celis: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the breakout session from Patterson, New Jersey. I'm going to ask everybody to use the chat, and chat in your name, location, and where you're calling from. We're really excited to have you here today, and looking forward to hearing questions from you all. So please go ahead and use the chat, and let us know where you're calling from.

It is my great privilege to introduce my community celebrity, Daryl Jackson, who is a leader in the city of Patterson, and a part of the Passaic County Food Policy Council Resident Advisory Board, and he has just provided tremendous contribution to the Passaic County Food Policy Council, and has been for responsible being a thought partner with me on designing the Resident Advisory Board recruiting, Resident Advisory Board members, thinking through agendas, and just managing how residents are going to be providing strategic direction to the Passaic County Food Policy Council, and really functioning as advisors. So I'd like to welcome Daryl and thank him for joining us today.

Daryl Jackson: Hello. Thank you having me. Good evening, everyone, afternoon.

Mary Celis: I have a couple of questions that I'm going to ask Daryl about his role in the Passaic County Food Policy Council's Resident Advisory Board. But again, I'm going to invite you all to also submit questions into the Q&A, and either Daryl or myself can answer those questions. So please be thinking about either follow-up questions that you have, or new questions that you'd like to pose to either myself or Daryl. But first, I'll start with Daryl. Daryl, could you tell us a little bit just about yourself, and why you agreed to join the Passaic County Food Policy Council Resident Advisory Board?

Daryl Jackson: Sure. So my name is Daryl Jackson, as [inaudible 00:00:00] said. It's nice to be here and to be able to express all that we're going to be able to express today. I'm born and raised in Patterson, left Patterson maybe four months and came straight back, I felt like this is where my life is. I felt I had the opportunity to do what a lot of us say when we were young, to be able to give back to our communities, and then life just happens a lot of times. Life happened to me, and it kept me here, and I was able to actually fulfill that dream, to be able to give back to my community and make that a lifelong thing for me, whether it be working for nonprofits, being part of this advisory board, or doing just things in the city, for my city, just in general. So I can go on and on about that, but just in general, born and raised here, and my heart is here, so that's why I do the work I do.

Mary Celis: Thanks, Daryl. Can you tell me a little bit about why you decided to join the Resident Advisory Board?

Daryl Jackson: I joined the Resident Advisory Board because I really do appreciate the work that the Passaic County Food Policy Council is doing. I always wanted to see differences in the policies that are being made that are being followed because we were introduced to the term food apartheid, this is something that I always felt was very purposeful, but it was very hard to express that. I wanted to make sure that when I was able to express that, it was in an appropriate way and in a way that my voice would be heard and not shunned. This was one of those avenues that allowed that opportunity, and I fell upon ears that were wide open, so I appreciate it.

Mary Celis: Daryl, thank you. I've said this to you before that you're a natural leader in the city, and so we are really grateful that you said yes, and you've done a phenomenal job getting the word out about the Food Policy Council among residents and recruiting residents. Can you tell me a little about any shift that you've seen in terms of why having a Resident Advisory Board has been important?

Daryl Jackson: Well, we've talked about quite a few already when we mentioned the Food Desert Relief Act. I was able to voice an opinion that I felt that, as a community, the Resident Advisory Board, we discussed how we felt about this, and we discussed what it was that we felt should be shared as a community. So I was able to voice that opinion, I was able to express how us, as a community, felt almost like a trumpet, instead of just one voice, I was several voices in that moment where we came as a community and agreed, "This is what we feel is important." So when we were presented a project, when we presented something that looks nice to our community, and I'm trying to use as simple language as possible, we recognize and notice, "Well, hey, you're missing something." And we thought, "Hey, quality of food matters."

And so we said that back and that kind of having them actually hear us, and then come back with a sort of edited project that incorporated our opinions, that right there shows it was a great example of us actually grasping the power that we know we had. We just had to push it a little bit and wait for the opportunities to come, so that alone.

And then one more example might be the Healthy Corner Store initiative that we are promoting and that we are pushing for. That allowed me to become a partner or liaison with a store owner, with the funders of these wonderful projects that are coming into our city, and put the power in the community's hands. We, as a community, came together and discussed how this can be unfolded, how this can be presented to the store owner, how the store owner can take these opportunities, ideas, and work with the entire community and not just a certain sector, not just some who frequent the store, but the entire community so that we can not only get better food options to the entire community, but they would want to come to the healthier corner stores that we have available to us.

So I think that the things that I did, and the things that I was able to do, the opportunities that were available to me to help in this, was an example of how the power was shifted into our hands to help with these projects versus just watching them be presented to us.

Mary Celis: Wow, those are really two great examples. Thank you for sharing those. Another other one that comes to mind that we had, I think more when we first started the Resident Advisory Board, is just the need that organizations had for residents to really be advising and informing on their outreach, community outreach and engagement strategies. We've had a longstanding strategy of SNAP outreach and enrollment, also getting the word out about things like summer meals or school meal applications. We've been wanting to do a better job, and so I think that it would be helpful if you could share some of the things that you had, or recommendations that came out of the Resident Advisory Board, around doing community outreach better, because I think that that's something that would be really relevant to our listeners.

Daryl Jackson: Sure. One of the first things that a lot of organizations can make the assumption about, and I think that the organizations that we're working with are, and I think we heard it in the opening, that they're opening their eyes to certain things that were not being considered before. One of them is how outreach is being handled within the community, and how you are actually getting the assistance or getting the community to hop onto the projects.

What we saw was that the community wasn't, the entire community was not being used, simple statement. And the assumption sometimes is that since it's a digital world, everyone has access to social media, everyone has access to email, everyone is access to this, this, that and the third.

And so when you have a Resident Advisory Board, you have boots on the ground, essentially. And sometimes it's kind of hard to realize the strength that those boots on the ground can have. We are able to be the familiar faces that the community can more easily trust, and we are the ones who can have a more comfortable conversation when, let's say, for example, just walking by and you see a store, and I have a crowd of people who are next to the store and they see me hanging a sign on a store and they say, "Hey, well, what's going on there?" I have the opportunity to now engage a multitude of people in front of a store where that's not necessarily something that an organization can do. And whether it's even appropriate or not, the fact that the matter is I can offer a certain perspective into the community that maybe isn't available to organizations without something like a Resident Advisory Board.

So when it comes to outreach, we are able to open up our outreach a lot more because when organizations say we're in the digital age, while we really are and a lot of things get done because of our digital resources and digital tools, there are still certain parts of the community that are not able to access these things because they're not savvy with the tech. They simply are not interested in using the tech. They might even feel that these things should be more readily available because they were before, they were on community boards, they were on things like that. So I believe that the Resident Advisory Board also offers that kind of, I want to say backdoor access to the community, but backdoor sounds a little bit different because I'm also seeing a lot of transparency that's coming through a lot of the work that we're doing and the partnerships that we're making. So, that term didn't really work, but basically the Resident Advisory Board offers a better access to the community when it comes to outreaching the work that we do.

Mary Celis:

Thanks, Daryl. I think you described that beautifully. I think of you all as trusted leaders, and it's different when you all speak than when organizations speak because people know you and you're trusted leaders in the community. And so the message is received differently than when it is sent only from an organization. And so all of those suggestions about really a multi prong outreach, but also leveraging the power of local residents and leaders as messengers, and not just relying on those kind of, I would say, impersonal types of communication, that's important. But I think you all have really demonstrated that resident leaders are able to have that conversation with people in their community, whether it's about healthy food access, or vaccine hesitancy, or even things like why people aren't voting. And so I think that it's a model that speaks to authentic community engagement and outreach.

Daryl Jackson:

Very much.

Mary Celis:

Thank you for that. I have another question for you, but I'm just going to encourage the people in the breakout session to go ahead and use the chat and start thinking about questions you had either for Daryl or for myself, for the work of the Passaic County Food Policy Council, around our strategies. Which, if you may have missed the main section, our strategies have really been to advance equitable food policy in Passaic County, specifically, this project is working on the city of Patterson to improve local food procurement in purchasing, in our school district, to expand resident life community gardens, to expand participation in the Federal meal programs, specifically the child nutrition programs, things like summer meals, after school dinners, and improve the quality of meals that are served. Those are some of our bigger strategies. Daryl, is there one of those strategies that like speaks most personally to you? And maybe, can you tell me why?

Daryl Jackson:

Actually yes, it's coming up again. It's actually the Healthy Corner Store initiative. The reason why is because, from young, I was a young man going to the store, and it was called the corner store, and it sold certain things and the community looked a certain way, and there's no complaints about the way the community looks, but it was called the corner store, and it sold certain things that were for the entire community. And now, as I am 30 years older, I guess you could say, I'm looking, as I've watched my community transform, a lot of things have transformed, including the name of the store I go to. It was considered a just general corner store, and now they're considered bodegas.

That is one example of how the face of the community has changed, and while we embrace, as a community, certain changes, including that one, the difference that I'm noticing is that the food options that are being offered are not as whole-community oriented, let's put it that way.

And so this initiative gives access to the store owners, and we actually find out that the owners are doing their best and they actually didn't, never thought about this. You know what I mean? And that's one of the saving graces, that's one of the hopeful parts of doing the work, especially when it comes to being introduced to the organizations that are doing their work, and they say something like, "Well, we didn't realize that we were doing it this way." We went to the Resident Advisory Boards and community and said, "Let's ask them." It's kind of the same thing with them. They are living lives the same way that we are, and want to contribute to the community the same way that I do. And if I'm littering on the ground, I might not realize that doesn't contribute to my community. So if they're not cognizant of the food that's being offered not being healthy, then they won't realize that there is work and there is help that they can offer and assist with.

So partnering with them and then having this backstory while I do the work makes me feel better about the backstory. It makes me feel at peace, at ease, and okay with change, with transformation, change is okay. Transformation is okay. But not being able to adapt with it can be a problem. And so the Healthy Corner Store initiative speaks to something that I had noticed a long time ago and had been working with in my mind without realizing how big of a problem it may have actually been, and I'm coming full circle with that.

And it feels peaceful. It doesn't feel amazing. It doesn't feel like I'm doing great, great work. It just feels like I'm doing something that means something to my community, to the group of people that we decided together and say, "Let's take on this task." You know what I mean? And then to define partnerships with organizations who are willing to help with this, and then store owners who are willing to invest in the community, it's just a beautiful thing. It's just the way community is supposed to be.

Mary Celis:

Thank you so much, Daryl. And we have our first question from a participant, and I'll read the whole thing. And it's asking us to talk about how the Resident Advisory Board was formed. Was there a recruitment process who put together the Resident Advisory Board?

Thank you so much for that question because it really was somewhat of a process. We have a leadership team in the Food Policy Council, so it's something, creating some sort of Resident Advisory Board or leadership has been something that we've talked about for quite some time. We were really excited to be a part of the challenge team, and had some funding available to support stipends for resident leaders and members of the Resident Advisory Board. Because in the past, in previous years, we had worked to try to involve residents who weren't necessarily connected to an organization to participate in the Food Policy Council. Our meetings have always been open to the public. We've tried

meeting at different times, in the evening, in the morning, and we had some success with some different parent groups. We had some success with some youth councils, particularly over the summer, that engaged youth in internships.

But we noticed that part of participation kind of ebbed and flowed from those residents, and we also realized the importance of giving residents a particular role, and really had to think through how to engage residents in a way that wasn't overly time consuming, because essentially this is not a part of their regular job. They're giving their time outside of work hours, so we knew it wasn't going to be important to meet in the evening. And we created a structure and we based it off of, we're very thankful to be a part of, the Passaic County Food Policy Council is thankful to be a part of the Center for Livable Futures that's based out of Johns Hopkins University, it has a food policy council network, that's a national network. And so I reached out to them, they're a great research in terms of research.

And there's a Food Policy Council in Baltimore that has a well established Resident Advisory Board, where residents participate as advisors, as leaders, provide strategic direction to the council, and are provided stipends for their time. And so, from an equity standpoint, that was really important to me. We often ask residents to volunteer in various ways, through completing surveys and participating in listening sessions, and there's some real fatigue, I think, around being surveyed, and I really wanted to empower residents. And so we built our model off of that Food Policy Council initiative in Baltimore.

I had known Daryl through the years as a resident leader, he's really passionate about food access work, and we were able to hire Daryl in a more specific role to do the recruitment. And so we recruited residents through a variety of ways, it's a pilot program right now so it's really only open to Patterson residents, even though we are a, the city of Patterson, even though we're a countywide coalition, we needed to start small and really pilot this, and we recruited through our general coalition, through organizations, through city council people. And Daryl really led that process, and I think a lot of it happened through word of mouth. There was an agreement that was signed, where we created a description of the Resident Advisory Board, as well as role and responsibilities, but I'll let Daryl chime in if he has anything else to add in terms of recruitment.

Daryl Jackson:

Sure. So part of the recruitment process was we had a conversation about, well, who do we want in the conversation? Well, who do we want to help us advise when it comes to these projects and what kind of people, what kind of backgrounds and things like that, where we wanted to make sure that we captured the picture of each... Patterson is set up in different wards and each ward can have a different face, so we wanted to try to capture each of those faces.

We tried our best to make sure that we got someone who represented the City Hall, in other words, so a council member, something of sorts. We wanted to make sure that we had members who represented the working class, mothers or fathers who might have been coming home and having to feed their children and family with the food that there was readily available to them, so we wanted to make sure that we had their perspectives on how they felt about the food that they were wanting, speaking specifically about food, but we just tried our best to make sure that those that we invited and recruited had as wide a range of perspectives as possible to make sure that we could not miss any perspectives.

Again, I joined because I felt that my perspective, my voice, was not heard. And so as we do this work, we want to make sure that we don't find anyone else who has the same feeling. Otherwise, is the work being done? You know what I mean? So other than that, it kind of formed out of necessity. Like I said, we had people who realized that the work we're doing would be better done with community involvement. So from there, a snowball was rolled down the hill and here we are.

Mary Celis:

Thank you so much, Daryl. There is a follow-up question that's related, and it's asking us to comment on strategies for forming a Resident Advisory Board when there may not be trust and people are hesitant to join.

I can speak a little bit to this and why it was really important to me to find the right person, a trusted leader in the community, to actually be doing the recruiting. I think that that was a strategy that was important to me. Daryl already had so many relationships in the community, he had been leading in other spheres within the city, and so he was already a trusted leader rather than someone from an organization that people may not have known.

I think the other component of a strategy, we're really clear about roles and responsibilities, and even that came up at our last meeting, that we aren't asking residents to volunteer to implement strategies. We're not asking them to go out and volunteer in a community garden or go handout flyers. I think residents are often asked to volunteer in that capacity, but we really wanted to create a space for residents to be advisors, to have decision making power in how our strategies are formed, how they're implemented, how we're evaluating them, how we're using funds, that there would be a space for them to advocate, as the Food Policy Council advocates for institutions, whether it's at the state level or the county level, or the city level, that their voice would be front and center in our work.

And immediately, we just had a phenomenal response. People really responded beautifully to this idea. And they had said, "Yes, people don't ask us to do that. They ask us to go out and do the work, but not actually design the work." And so I think that was a strategy that I felt was really successful. And then I think just some of the basic work-around, to be authentic, to win their disagreements, to honor all the voices in the room, to make sure people are being heard. And Daryl, I'll open it up to you if there's anything else you want to add.

Daryl Jackson:

Sure. I actually love this one because it was a good one for me. The fact of the matter is, this is where trust can begin. Like she said, I might have been a trusted voice in the community, and that might be, from her perspective, because she trusted me based on the work that she's seen and things like that, yada, yada, yada. But when it comes to the community trusting organizations that are coming in to do this work, that's where there is a missing link. And I believe that the Resident Advisory Board can be that missing link. That's where trust is grown. That's where we can plant the seed of trust in the community, and the Resident Advisory Board can be that garden where it grows. The fact is, also, I was afraid of that too, but part of that fear was not wanting to voice my opinion because I didn't think it wanted to be heard.

We hear the term uncomfortable conversations, we hear that a lot. And I've also found that a lot of people who want to have those uncomfortable conversations don't really want to get as uncomfortable as I might make them. And I found a group that made me comfortable making them uncomfortable. So, that's where trust starts if you ask me. Gabby, Brittany, just to throw out a few names that are here, especially Mary, I speak

with her most often, and I sometimes make them uncomfortable because we are doing this work because I'm uncomfortable.

I'm a community member who is dealing with a lot of the issues that these projects are working towards speaking on. And therefore, again, they bring projects into our communities and don't speak to us. And now they're speaking to us, asking us our opinions about these things, so if trust is an issue we can choose to see this moment as a place to begin, as a place to where trust can begin. They're asking us our opinions and therefore we need to be ready to offer our opinions. And the Resident Advisory Board offers a platform for the community to come together to have that opinion ready.

Mary Celis:

Yeah. Thank you so much, Daryl, and thank you for being willing to voice those opinions that can make people feel uncomfortable. And sometimes there's disagreement among members of the Resident Advisory Board, and I think that some of the strategies around, just some of the facilitation skills I think are important, in terms of using I statements in honoring other people's perspectives, making sure we're not interrupting each other, sometimes we have to step up when we're not speaking enough or step back when we're speaking too much. And I think honoring some of those guidelines have been really important as well. And be willing to work through and have those conversation, and I think that speaks to the importance of relationships and providing this platform to build relationships and help people feel heard beyond being surveyed, beyond participating in a one time focus group, where this is an ongoing feedback loop that we have, and literally built on relationships.

There is another question about utilizing, have we had any thoughts on utilizing community health workers in some of our engagement strategies? And absolutely yes, we actually work closely with our local hospital, which is St. Joseph's Health, who has something called the Passaic County Health Coalition, that deploys community health workers throughout the community that do education, and that work, high utilizers of the healthcare system essentially. And they also are, many times, trusted residents in the community, and so they participate, the community health workers participate in the Food Policy Council, and are often making sure that whatever strategy it is that we're working on, for example, SNAP outreach and enrollment, that they're also a great avenue to push out outreach and engagement and provide us with feedback directly from their clients.

But I think that all of these models are really important and we're seeing more support and galvanization around things like SNAP ambassadors at farmers markets, community health workers, Resident Advisory Boards. And I think that it's all a similar strategy to harness the power of residents to be change agents in their own communities, and to create infrastructure around that, but also to honor people's time by compensating them. And so that's one of the things that I'll also highlight about our project. From an equity lens that was really important to us. As organizations, were on staff, I'm a staff person, and so when we were asking residents to provide this role, we wanted to make sure that they were being reimbursed or honored for their time, and we did some research around that in what happens in other communities and models for that, and really came up with a living wage stipend that honors their time.

And that was a conversation. We got feedback from them in terms of, is this workable for you? Is this honoring? Is this appropriate? And if not, then please let us know because we can make changes to it. We do try to work to come to consensus in the group around all of our processes and procedures as a way of honoring residents as leaders, residents as experts in their own community.

And so, thank you all for participating in this breakout session. Thank you to those of you who provided us with questions, and just want to thank, especially, my Resident Leader Champion, Daryl Jackson, for his amazing work. And I hope that you all can continue to advance the important work of making sure that residents are leading the way. Thank you.