

# **Community Voices Council Handbook**

*Updated March 2026*



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## About this Handbook

This Handbook is designed to support Community Voices Council (CVC) members in their participation and leadership. It outlines what to expect, how decisions are made, and how community voice is supported in practice.

The CVC is guided by a Board-approved Charter that defines its role and purpose. This Handbook complements the Charter by providing additional detail and practical guidance. While the Charter sets direction, this Handbook may change over time as the Council grows, learns, and adapts.

## Purpose & Background

The Community Voice Council (CVC) elevates the voices of community members who are or have been Medicaid beneficiaries, uninsured, or have experienced systemic barriers to care, and supports their active participation in shaping the systems they are most impacted by. The council is an up to 20-member group chartered by the Better Health Together (BHT) Board of Directors. The CVC exists to ensure that people most impacted by health inequities—particularly those with lived experience navigating Medicaid, being uninsured, or facing barriers—shape the systems meant to serve them. The CVC shares BHT’s mission: “to radically improve the health of the region.”

The CVC provides community guidance to BHT and serves as a key accountability and feedback loop for BHT’s strategies, investments, and system-level work. The Council focuses on translating lived experience into actionable insights that informs program design, policy direction, and resource allocation.

The CVC does not function as an advisory group in name only; it is a forum for shared governance, learning, and impact on our region’s health.

## Scope & Roles

The Council’s scope and roles are designed to ensure community insight meaningfully shapes strategy, programs, and investments.

*The CVC’s core functions include:*

### Strategic Guidance

- Providing input on BHT strategic priorities, focus areas, and goals
- Offering early-stage feedback on proposed initiatives for key project areas of the organization

### Program Design & Improvement

- Advising on program design, function, and updates to ensure accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and community relevance
- Identifying potential barriers, risks, and impacts before and during implementation

### Monitoring & Learning

- Providing guidance and feedback on BHT’s annual Landscape Assessment, including identifying priority gaps, community-identified needs, and emerging trends.

- Reviewing available BHT data to identify resource gaps, system barriers, and opportunities for improvement from a community perspective.
- Informing how success is defined and measured from a community perspective

### Community Insight & Connection

- Elevating lived experience and community perspectives to inform BHT's programming
- Serving as a trusted feedback loop between community members and BHT
- Supporting community members, Medicaid beneficiaries and impacted populations\* to play an active role in improving the health of the community.
- Acting as ambassadors for Better Health Together by accurately sharing information about BHT's mission, Accountable Community of Health (ACH) role, and Community Care Hub work within their communities

### Accountability

- Supporting transparency and mutual accountability by providing feedback on how community input is incorporated into decisions
- Participating in feedback sessions that help improve future outcomes and document lessons learned

The CVC may bring recommendations and opportunities directly to BHT leadership and, when appropriate, to the BHT Board of Directors.

### Community Sponsorship Decision-Making Role

- The Community Voices Council will be responsible for decision-making related to Community Sponsorship awards, consistent with BHT policies, compliance requirements.
- Specific authority, scope, and processes will be developed and formalized following approval of community governance structures.
- Further details will be provided after co-governance structures are formalized. This decision-making role will be phased in following onboarding, training, and formal delegation by BHT leadership and/or the Board, with clear documentation of scope and constraints.

## Outcomes & Measures

The CVC's impact will be assessed using a combination of state-required measures and locally defined indicators including:

- Number of community members informed or engaged
- Percentage of participants reporting shared decision-making

- Number of distinct sectors engaged in decision-making
- Qualitative examples of community-informed adaptations or decisions

## What the Community Voices Council is – and is not

To support clarity and shared understanding, below is a summary of the CVC is (and is not).

### The CVC is:

- A community advisory body that elevates lived experience to inform BHT strategy, programs, and investments
- A structured space for dialogue, learning, and shared accountability between community members and BHT
- A forum for identifying system-level barriers, opportunities, and improvements
- A trusted feedback loop connecting community insight to organizational decision-making

### The CVC is not:

- A forum for individual concerns about personal social/health care
- A support group or therapeutic space
- A decision-making body for internal staffing or operational management
- A replacement for the BHT Board of Directors
- A standing volunteer/employment pool with guaranteed ongoing stipends

*Please note: The CVC plays an advisory role to BHT's governance structures. It does not replace Board governance.*

## Council Representation Values

The CVC is made of up to 20 members who reflect the geographic, racial, cultural, and lived-experience diversity of the BHT region. To support inclusive and meaningful representation, the CVC is guided by the following principles:

### Lived Experience Leads

The CVC values firsthand experience navigating systems and barriers related to health, access, and wellbeing. This includes lived experience related to Medicaid enrollment or lack of insurance, navigating healthcare and social service systems, economic instability or housing insecurity, disability, mental health or substance use challenges, legal-system involvement, rural or Tribal community contexts, and experiences of racism, discrimination, or exclusion.

### **Diverse Representation Thrives**

Membership reflects the diverse identities, cultures, and experiences of the region, including (but not limited to) people of color, Indigenous communities, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people across age, gender, and cultural identities.

### **Geographic Inclusion**

The Council includes voices from underserved regions, urban, rural, and Tribal communities across the BHT service area.

### **Sector & Community Perspectives**

Members may bring perspectives from community-based organizations, Tribal governments, public systems, or informal community leadership roles, while remaining grounded in community accountability.

### **Landscape-Informed Representation**

Membership goals for the Community Voices Council are informed by BHT's Landscape Assessment. Findings from the assessment including identified service gaps, population-level inequities, geographic disparities, and emerging community needs help guide outreach, recruitment, and selection priorities for the CVC.

### **Commitment to fostering belonging, learning, and continuous improvement**

Members demonstrate a commitment to fostering belonging, shared learning, and continuous improvement. Members are open to learning and adapting.

### **Engagement & punctuality:**

Members are expected to attend meetings, arrive on time, and be engaged.

Representation will be reviewed periodically to ensure we meet the needs of our annual landscape assessment. BHT will annually invite CVC members to complete a self-identified demographic survey. The purpose of this tool is to understand, in aggregate, who is currently represented at the table and to identify gaps that may inform future recruitment, outreach, and support. Responses are de-identified and not used to evaluate or determine stipends or affect current participation or leadership role.

## **Membership Selection & Term Limits**

The Community Voices Council will establish clear, transparent processes for member selection, onboarding, and term limits to support continuity, shared leadership, and equitable participation over time.

### **Council Size**

The CVC will consist of no more than 20 members at any given time.

### **Term Length**

- Members serve three-year terms.
- With approval from the decision-making committee, members may serve up to two consecutive terms (maximum of six years total).
- After completing two consecutive terms, a member must step away for at least one year before reapplying.

### Staggered Terms

- Terms will be staggered to ensure continuity and avoid full turnover at once.
- Initial staggering may include one-year and two-year appointments during transition periods.

### Application & Nomination

- Membership is filled through an open application process, with an option for community or partner nomination.
- Nominations do not guarantee selection and must include a completed application.

### Selection Process

- Applications are reviewed by BHT Staff who create a recommendation to the Board Governance Committee.
- Selection criteria include the outcome of our landscape assessment, lived experience, geographic representation, perspective diversity, and alignment with the CVC's scope and values.
- The Board Governance Committee makes the final decision on new members

### Reapplication

- Current members whose terms are ending may reapply if eligible.
- Reapplication is not automatic and follows the same review process as new applicants.
- Reapplication decisions are based on current Council needs and representation gaps, not solely on prior service.

### Transition for Members Who Joined Prior to 2026

- Members who joined the Community Voices Council prior to 2026 did so when formal term limits and standardized selection processes were not yet in place.
- To ensure transparency, and consistency moving forward, all members who joined prior to 2026 are required to apply through the same application and selection process as new applicants in the next recruitment cycle.
- Prior service on the CVC is valued and may be considered as part of the application review; however, prior participation does not guarantee continued membership.

This transition process supports the CVC's shift to a sustainable, clearly defined governance model and ensures that all members are selected through the same shared standards.

## Leadership

The CVC utilizes a distributed leadership model designed to support shared facilitation. Leadership roles, terms, and responsibilities will be co-developed with the CVC and formalized following alignment with the BHT Board's governance framework.

## Leadership Responsibilities:

- Leadership team is comprised of the CVC representatives serving on the board (or who will serve on the board when the time comes).
- Serve a three year term
  - If selected to represent the CVC on the BHT Board of Directors, a member's CVC leadership term will be adjusted as needed to align with the length and requirements of their Board service.
- Collaborate with BHT staff to shape agendas and meeting design
- Support inclusive facilitation and shared leadership
- Help steward council priorities and focus areas
- Serve as a liaison between the CVC, BHT staff, and Board leadership
- Estimated time commitment for leadership is an additional 2 hours per month
- See compensation policy for details on compensation

## Board Representation

The Community Voices Council informs and collaborates with the Better Health Together Board of Directors to strengthen communication, shared understanding, and accountability between community voice structures and Board governance.

CVC members who serve in a Board-connected role act as liaisons, helping to surface community perspectives and ensure that insights from the Council are reflected in broader strategic conversations.

Specific processes related to selection, roles, responsibilities, and term alignment will be established in coordination with the BHT Board of Directors and may evolve over time. Board-connected roles are not guaranteed, are not a recruitment incentive, and may change over time based on governance needs.

## Decision-Making Model

At times, BHT leadership or the BHT Board of Directors may delegate specific decisions to the Community Voices Council for input or determination. In these cases, BHT will clearly communicate the scope of the decision, any constraints or non-negotiables, and how the decision will be used.

The CVC's decision-making authority does not extend to organizational governance, staffing, personnel, fiduciary, contractual, or legal decisions, which remain the responsibility of BHT leadership and the Board.

In addition to delegated decisions, the CVC may also use this decision-making process for internal Council matters, such as meeting schedules, agendas, norms, or other operational decisions that support the effective functioning of the Council.

## Gradient of Agreement

The Community Voices Council uses a Gradient of Agreement Consensus model, with a majority vote as a back-up when consensus cannot be reached. This modified consensus seeks broad agreement rather than unanimity. When concerns are raised, the Council works collaboratively to address them through discussion, clarification, or revision.

- 1 = Cannot support
- 2 = Have concerns
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Mostly agree
- 5 = Fully support

## Majority Vote Back-Up

If consensus (100% of members vote 3, 4 or 5) cannot be reached after reasonable effort, a decision may be made by simple majority vote of members present. BHT staff may clarify when a decision requires timeliness due to funding, compliance, or operational constraints.

## Email Voting

Same model applies for email voting.

## Quorum

No quorum is required for voting. However, if participation is particularly low, BHT staff or CVC members may suggest waiting for more engagement before making a decision.

## Shared Expectations

The CVC functions as a core component of BHT's community governance ecosystem. Accountability within this relationship is mutual.

### CVC members commit to:

- Contributing approximately 2–5 hours per month, recognizing that participation is compensated for time, labor, and expertise
- Attending and actively participating in CVC gatherings, with no more than three absences per year (see Attendance & Participation below)
- Engaging in respectful, good-faith dialogue grounded in lived experience and collective responsibility
- Coming prepared by reviewing shared materials in advance when possible
- Sharing insights from personal, professional, or community perspectives relevant to Council topics
- Participating in required onboarding and learning opportunities related to governance, and systems orientation
- Building familiarity with BHT's work in order to accurately represent and explain BHT's role
- Respecting the scope of community governance and shared decision-making structures

- Serving as ambassadors for BHT by accurately sharing information about BHT’s mission and work within their communities
- Keeping BHT updated on your contact info (especially as it relates to stipends)
- Upholding BHT’s values and Code of Conduct.

As capacity allows, members may also participate in time-limited engagement opportunities such as focus groups, workgroups, surveys, or representing the CVC at partner convenings.

**BHT commits to:**

- Clearly communicating how CVC input informs decisions
- Closing the feedback loop by documenting what was heard, what actions were taken, and when recommendations were not adopted and why
- Providing regular updates on outcomes and next steps
- Creating predictable, transparent processes that support meaningful engagement
- Arranging meeting space and technology
- Providing food for in-person meetings
- Sending reminder emails and post-meeting recaps
- Providing training and support necessary to the CVC members
- Processing stipends within fifteen (15) days of receipt of all required documentation, following the qualifying meeting or activity.

## **Attendance & Participation Accountability**

Active participation is essential to the effective functioning of the Community Voices Council. Attendance expectations are intended to support shared responsibility, fairness, and continuity.

### **Attendance Monitoring**

- Attendance is tracked by BHT staff and a report is shared with CVC leadership periodically
- Members are expected to attend scheduled meetings and communicate in advance (at least 1 hour before meeting time) when they are unable to attend

### **Check-In Process**

If a member approaches or exceeds the allowed number of absences within a calendar year, a check-in conversation will be initiated by either BHT staff or designated CVC leadership, depending on the situation. These meetings are intended to:

- Understand capacity and circumstances

- Clarify continued interest and ability to participate
- Review expectations and available support

### Escalation

Continued non-attendance or lack of communication following a staff check-in may result in:

- Attendance concerns being shared with the Board Governance Committee
- A recommendation regarding continued membership
- Consideration will be given to extenuating circumstances, with the goal of supporting participation whenever possible.

### Removal

The Board Governance Committee may determine that a member is no longer able to meet participation expectations. Removal from the CVC may occur when attendance or engagement requirements are not met. This process is intended to be respectful, transparent, and consistent, and to support the overall health and effectiveness of the Council.

## Compensation & Support

CVC members receive a stipend based on participation, recognizing that this work is labor—not volunteerism. Compensation reflects the time, lived experience, insight, and expertise contributed through approved Community Voices Council activities, in accordance with the attached Stipend Policy. See Stipend Policy for details.

Compensated activities may include:

- Scheduled CVC meetings
- CVC leadership preparation meetings
- Participation in approved surveys, focus groups, or time-limited workgroups
- BHT-approved advisory or volunteer engagements
- Select BHT-approved trainings or learning opportunities, when participation is requested as part of CVC advisory work

Activities must be approved in advance by BHT in order to be considered for compensation.

Beyond core CVC meetings, additional engagement opportunities (such as workgroups, surveys, or partner representation) may arise periodically.

When additional engagement is requested by BHT, eligibility and reimbursement details—including travel and childcare—will be communicated in advance.

At times, BHT may invite CVC members to optional trainings or learning opportunities that are not compensated. Participation in these opportunities is always voluntary.

CVC members may also receive reimbursement for eligible travel and childcare expenses, consistent with BHT policy.

**Stipends are not guaranteed income; they are compensation for time, insight, and participation in approved activities.**

## Technology & Privacy Practices

In an effort to protect privacy and build trust:

- No AI notetakers or recording in meetings
  - BHT will offer an accessibility exception possible with advance notice (at least 48 hours before the meeting)
- If AI is added by mistake, it will be removed and followed up by staff/co-chairs

In an effort to build connection in virtual meeting spaces, attendees are encouraged to keep cameras on when possible, recognizing accessibility and bandwidth considerations.

## Handbook Review & Evolution

This Handbook and its guiding charter is a living document. It will be revisited annually—or as needed—to ensure alignment with community needs, organizational direction, and lessons learned from practice.