

BELONGING CULTURE

The Practice of Centering Voice

ESTIMATED TIME REQUIRED



65 minutes

OVERVIEW

This session introduces the practice of centering voice as an inclusive act that can be a useful and transformative tool for collaboration amongst your service year corps members, stakeholders, and program partners. In this session, your corps members will be guided through a process to help them understand the value and importance of centering voice.

LEARNING OUTCOMES



By the end of this session, your corps members will be able to:

- Engage with a basic framework for centering voice
- Be centered as they participate in dialogue and reflection activities with one another about their individual past experiences
- Examine the challenges to consistently centering voice
- Practice strategies that support the efforts of centering voice

TRAINING SESSION RESOURCES

Before getting started with this training session, you should review the Preparation section below as well as familiarize yourself with this guide's Session Script. This session should be presented directly to corps members using this downloadable presentation:

- **Downloadable Presentation:** [*B3: Training Session: The Practice of Centering Voice*](#)

The downloadable presentation includes speaker notes for program staff who are facilitating this session directly to corps members, making it easy for staff to walk through the presentations efficiently and effectively.

PREPARATION

Trainer Expectations

Throughout this training session, trainers will be asked to facilitate the group through small group discussions and full group discussions. Some of the topics may feel challenging for your corps members to engage with, and they may not want to engage in conversations on these topics at first. Part of fostering a belonging environment is making the space equal with corps members and program staff. Therefore, we recommend you, as the facilitator, prepare responses to the questions posed to the corps members throughout the session as a strategy to help spark conversation if needed. Before beginning this session, review the Session Outline & Script below and ensure familiarity with the content to be prepared to facilitate activities and answer potential questions from corps members. You'll notice in the Session Outline there are resources linked to provide background on the subject matters included in this training.

	TIME ESTIMATE
	LEARNING OUTCOMES
	VIRTUAL MODIFICATION
	ACTIVITY
	HELPFUL TIP

Necessary Materials

- Distribute pen and paper for your service year corps members to take notes
- One printed copy for each corps member:
 - [B0: Glossary](#)

Virtual Modifications

If you plan to facilitate the training session in a virtual environment, we recommend the following modifications:

- Use a whiteboard that can be displayed on camera or share your screen and work in a word or google document
- If you have group break out sessions, set up the groups in advance via your video conferencing software
- Don't forget to send an email with any necessary handouts in advance of your remote session

SESSION OUTLINE

The following outline walks you through what to expect throughout this session and how to prepare.

I. Centering Voice Objectives

In this section you introduce the topic for this Belonging session, set a lens for the conversation, and provide tips for engaging throughout the session. You will also distribute the B0: Glossary.

II. The What: On Centering Voice

In this section you will introduce Centering Voice - a framework for making sure that those who are closest to or most affected by policies, practices, programs, initiatives, laws, etc. are included in the process of developing and implementing those items as well as determining priorities and focus areas.

ACTIVITY: Centering Voice - small & full group discussion



III. The How: Context Informs Strategies for Centering Voice

In this section you will explore how the context of the lived experiences we wish to center will always inform the strategy for how we go about centering voices.

ACTIVITY: Challenges to Centering Voice - full group discussion



ACTIVITY: Reflections on Feeling Centered - small & full group discussion



IV. Close Out



You will lead a close out by checking in with the group after three Belonging sessions. You will then encourage corps members to journal about the overall theme of this session.

SESSION SCRIPT

The following script should be used for presenting this session directly to your corps members. It is recommended that you review this script before beginning the session. *Italicized prompts* are intended to be guidance for you as the trainer rather than part of the script you will communicate to your corps members.

Slide #1

Welcome to our third session - The Practice of Centering Voice. Today we will work together to:

- Engage with a basic framework for centering voice
- Be centered as you participate with feeling in dialogue and reflection activities with one another about their individual past experiences
- Examine the challenges to consistently centering voice
- Practice strategies that support the efforts of centering voice

Distribute the [B0: Glossary](#) to your service year corps members and have them review the key terms for Session B3 so they are able to become familiar with the terminology used throughout the session.

Slide #2

Our agenda for today is:

- To review the lends for our session and how to engage with the session material.
- We'll then cover the who, the what, and the how for centering voice.
- We'll engage in a handful of activities on each of these topics and we'll journal and reflect on how to put this into action before we wrap up.

Slide #3

Today we are going to talk about centering voice. We will reflect on our shared experiences with feelings centered or not centered in different spaces. We will identify the challenges of centering voice in our practices and name strategies that create space for voices to be centered. And with these lenses, let's discuss the tactile pieces you can do today.

Slide #4

We'll start our conversation the same way as others in this belonging curriculum - with suggestions for how to engage with today's content:

- Take note of terms and concepts that resonate with you during the workshop. These can be reviewed for further reflection today and throughout the year.
- Consider your lived experiences and how they influence your understanding of the social identities we will be discussing today.
- Stay open. Some of the information we share might challenge your ideas around belonging and safety and that's okay. If we all stay open, then we can hold the container together.
- If you are more knowledgeable on this topic, challenge yourself to do some deeper reflection.
- There is always room to learn and grow. We are all a work in progress.

Any questions? Let's get started.

Slide #5

So why is centering voice important? By intentionally and actively centering voice, we can ensure all people affected by decisions are co-creators in their learning experiences and in determining their future success through shared decision-making. It is about creating a system that allows people to come as they are and making decisions as a collective. By allowing people to be a part of the decision-making processes that affect them, they are then more invested in the outcomes of the decisions.

Slide #6

What do we mean by centering voice? Let's dive in.

Slide #7

I am going to start our conversation on centering voice by first defining solidarity. The reason we are starting our conversation today with the definition of solidarity is because the practice of centering the voices of others can be understood as an act of solidarity. Solidarity is the unity or agreement of feelings or actions, especially among individuals with a common interest; it is mutual support within a group.

Slide #8

Centering voice is a framework for making sure that those who are closest to or most affected by policies, practices, programs, initiatives, laws, etc. are included in the process of developing and implementing those items as well as determining priorities and focus areas.

The framework prioritizes people over systems and places those people at the center of all decision-making.

Slide #9

Centering voice requires a commitment to building authentic relationships, being willing to share ownership, and being inclusive of all stakeholders throughout the entire engagement process.

Centering voice is an essential feature of sustainable and transformative work in communities because it demands we anchor our decisions in the experiences and needs of the stakeholders who will be affected by those decisions. It requires that we create space for their voice and their interests to guide our decisions.

Slide #10

Sustaining efforts to center voices requires individual, organizational, and collective reflection on how inequities came to be and are maintained. Shared actions then need to be identified and implemented to disrupt the reproduction of inequities and their impacts.

Slide #11

It's critical to affirm the lived experiences and needs of those being impacted – and understand that lived experiences are valid and credible types of evidence.

We also need to name and understand our own privileges: Are you male? Cisgender? Heterosexual? Able-bodied? White? Do you have power or influence over another person or persons? Being able to name and understand our own identities and privileges will better support our efforts to center the voices of others who are different from ourselves.

We must be collaborative, build relationships, and share power and control in goal setting, processes for achieving those goals, and in decision-making.

Finally, we have to identify barriers that might prevent important and diverse stakeholders from engaging with us, then do the work of removing those barriers.

These are just some of the strategies that support the process of centering voice. We will go deeper into the strategies in a moment.

For now, can you name a time when you felt your experience and voice was centered in important decisions? How did that make you feel to be included? If you cannot think of a time, can you name a decision that was made on your behalf in which you wish you were included in the decision-making process? What was the decision and how did it impact you even though you were not included?

Pause and prompt: Give time for 2-3 responses, pay attention, summarize details. If there aren't any volunteers, you can start the conversation by sharing your answer to these questions.

Slide #12

Let's discuss centering voice. I will give you a few minutes to think about your responses. Then you will break up into small groups of 2-3.

In your small groups, you will discuss: Who is or was a community member, outside of your immediate family, that you believe has had your back and supported you? How did they help you feel seen? How does the memory of this person serve you now?

Before breaking into groups, share your answer to these questions to get them in the correct mindset. Then break them into groups and set a timer for 10 minutes.

After bringing everyone back from small group discussions, ask if there are volunteers who want to share their responses to the prompts or anything that resonated or connected with them that their peers shared. Summarize, pay attention for common themes, ideas, and experiences.



Create breakout rooms of 2-3 and have them share their responses with each other for 10 minutes before closing the breakout rooms.

Slide #13

Let's go a little more in-depth with context and strategies for centering voice.

Slide #14

Context is a crucial aspect of the practice of centering voice. One way to obtain contextual information is through research. There are a variety of ways you can research, some are listed on this slide. Take a moment to review these items. Keep in mind though, no matter how much research you do, you will never ever know more about a community than the people who make up that community. You cannot skip the research, but at the same time, you cannot just assume to have the answers because you did the research. Trusting the expertise of community members and being inclusive of your stakeholders in decision-making is highly critical.

Slide #15

The context for the process of centering voice comes from a variety of places and requires us to be intentional in the questions we ask. These are some examples of the type of probing questions we can use to guide our learnings about the community and our interactions with members of those communities as we seek to center their experiences and include them in decision-making.

Let's read through these. Once I am done reading through, think about your own identities and experiences, what are common narratives that are told about you, people like you, or your community by outsiders who do not belong to your community? Are these narratives the reality of your experience? Are they harmful or affirming? Reflect on that as I read through these. We will share as a group.

- Narrative - What are the dominant narratives that are told about this community by people from outside of the community? What are the narratives this community tells about itself? Are they similar or different narratives?
- History of the community - What is the history of their relationship to public/private institutions?
- Current conditions of the community - What are the current conditions of the community? Is there the presence of collective hope for the community? Are ongoing community development efforts being done for the benefit of the current residents of the community?
- Family & social context of community members/program participants - What are the individual lived experiences of stakeholders in the community you have spoken with? How are those individual experiences similar or different from one another and the community in general?

Pause & prompt: Give time for participants to discuss in the full group. You can use the questions from the slide for the group to answer as well about their own experiences (i.e. What are the current conditions of your community – how would you describe them?)

Slide #16

The context of the lived experiences of the voices we wish to center will always inform the strategy for how we go about centering voices. Context can be driven by a number of factors, as seen on this slide. Are there any contextual elements or strategies that are not in here that you think are important to note? Why do you think it is important to be intentional in our process when trying to authentically engage in the practice of centering voice? Reflect on that as I read through these. We will discuss this as a group.

Context

- Maintaining an ongoing and evolving understanding of the current context of the community and stakeholders you serve is a must.
- Community is multi-layered and can be rooted in geographical location, shared identities and interests, or experiences.
- You cannot develop effective strategies for centering voice without doing the work of understanding the experiences of the community and stakeholders you are impacting.
- Centering voice requires engaging with stakeholders from a place of affirmation, validating their experience and expertise.

Strategies

- Your strategy for centering voice must include a plan or routine for staying informed of the context of your community and stakeholders, as well as their experiences, through research and engagement.
- Centering lived experiences is a universal strategy that can be effectively applied in every context to promote equitable outcomes, but it requires a targeted approach based on the experiences and needs of your community and stakeholders, and may require multiple approaches to achieving a universal goal.
- Starting from a place of centering voice will help inform other strategies for being effectively responsive.

Pause & prompt: Give time for participants to discuss in the full group.

Slide #17

What challenges exist for you in being able to effectively center the voice of others, particularly those voices in which you might have a form of power or influence over?

What strategies or actions can you begin to (or further continue to) utilize for being able to put the practices of centering voice into action?

How might the practice of centering voice be useful towards achieving your program goals?

Open up to ask for volunteers to share their thoughts in a full group discussion. Be ready to share your own response using examples from your own experiences if nobody volunteers to speak at first.

Slide #18

Let's now reflect on a time when you wanted your voice to be centered by someone who had influence or power over you. We are going to break into smaller groups to discuss and then come back and share as a large group. You will have 7-10 minutes in a small group and then we will have 4-6 minutes to share as a large group.

Before breaking into groups, read the questions and give everyone a minute to think about their answers. Share a story about a time in your life when you wanted or needed to feel seen, heard, or understood by someone who had influence or power over you. What effect did this have on you? What did this experience teach you? How can this experience inform your own practice during your service year in order to support achieving the goals you have set? What would you change from this experience?

Break them into groups and set a timer for 10 minutes.

After bringing everyone back from small group discussions, ask if there are volunteers who want to share

their responses to the prompts or anything that resonated or connected with them that their partners shared. Be prepared to share your own thoughts to begin the conversation. Summarize, pay attention to common themes, ideas, and experiences.



Create breakout rooms of 2-3 and have them share their responses with each other for 10 minutes before closing the breakout rooms.

Slide #19

As we close out today's session, I invite you to share your thoughts on how the sessions we have completed so far impact creating a belonging culture? To review, we've covered 3 sessions: Values, Identity, and Community Agreements; Creating Safe Spaces – The Brain Science of Belonging; and now, The Practice of Centering Voice.



Use the chat box for virtual sessions.

Slide #20

Thank you for your participation in today's session on centering voice. As you close out today, journal and reflect on how centering voice is crucial to creating inclusive and belonging spaces. What are you committing to after today's session that will allow you in the future to center voice for others? What practices will you change moving forward?