

#OneCLS Community Engagement Model

FAQ's

Will we automatically reject advocacy that is not initiated by community or community partner?

No. If we received a request that aligns with our strategic priorities, has a systemic impact, we have the capacity to take on, and we are the appropriate body to take it on, the expectation is that we do not turn it away.

Community engagement in our advocacy is the goal which can happen no matter who brings the advocacy. What is considered is whether community was connected before the advocacy was introduced to CLS. If it has, we continue to work collegially with community to further those efforts. If it has not, we strategize on how to integrate community.

While our long-term vision is for the majority of our work to be community initiated, we have a lot of work to do before getting there.

If we are prioritizing community and community partners, where does that leave Alliance Partners?

As a part of the Alliance for Equal Justice, we are tasked with leading legislative advocacy, representing people who are undocumented and those that are incarcerated. Our partners in most cases cannot do that work. When we agree to take on work from our Alliance partners, approval is not required. Once discussed at the tables and CET meeting for strategy, it is highly probable that we will move forward with advocacy efforts.

We will continue to take referrals and projects from Alliance partners if and when the projects fall in our wheelhouse and we have capacity. If a project was brought to the Alliance partner by community or they have been working with community, we will continue to engage those communities. If the project did not originate with community and CLS agrees to take it, we will identify an engagement plan for ensuring community and community partners are at the table.

Who is responsible for Community Engagement? Is it exclusively the role of the ACES?

Community engagement is everyone's responsibility. The creation of the ACES role and the CET is not for the purpose of shifting relationship, but instead is an opportunity to expand our existing work and maximize our community connections.

What is the role of the ACES when the advocacy is in litigation stages? For example, can we ask the ACES to contact witnesses, do declarations, etc.

ACES are an essential part of every advocacy project. ACES should be seen as partners with expertise in engaging with our community partners. Thinking through strategy for community engagement is the responsibility of everyone, including the ACES. The ACES role is not intended to be a task specialist but instead is someone to partner with in discussing and fulfilling the needs of our clients, community and program.

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ACES *can* stay on advocacy once it reaches the litigation stage, depending on the work and needs of the project. Through collaborative efforts and discussions, the advocacy team can identify tasks for each member. This includes ACES based on the recommendations listed under litigation in the #OneCLS Community Engagement Model. If an ACES is not needed for the team, it is strongly recommended that the ACES/CET and the team working on the litigation stay connected and communication is consistent to ensure that partner organizations are up to date on the project.

When is the CET meeting?

CET meetings are every Monday 3:00p - 4:30p. This is subject to change based on input from staff and the needs of the program. If there is a change, staff will be notified. If for whatever reason advocacy teams would like to have a discussion about advocacy, but cannot meet during the regular scheduled time, the CET can work with the team to find a mutually opportune time to discuss the advocacy. After the advocacy is discussed, the CET will develop an engagement strategy plan to provide to the team within seven calendar days.

Can ACES do declarations?

ACES should be trained to do basic declaration interviews and complete declaration templates created by attorneys with clear instruction and expectations from the attorney. This does not mean that paralegal legal assistants will no longer do this work. Whether an ACES should do a declaration on a project can be determined with a discussion among the project team.

Is this model fixed or more flexible?

Flexibility of our community engagement is optimized when the CET is brought in as early in the advocacy as possible to strategize around our engagement. The Community Engagement Model is intended to be just that – a model. We wanted to provide clarity and specificity for those that need it, but still leave it open to be utilized in different roles and in different geographic locations throughout the state. Relationships, relationship building, and accountability is a fluid dynamic. We hope this model provides enough support to get started but is not intended to be an instruction manual. Please let us know if there are specific parts of the model that seem to read as rigid. We are open to reframing language and adding clarification so that our intentions are clear.

Are ACES available to lead projects?

Yes. ACES can lead projects based on professional development and the needs of the program. Examples where an ACES may be appropriate to lead include investigations into an issue raised by community, campaigns, research projects, and legislative advocacy.

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What about emergency situations and last-minute needs?

If there is an emergency or last-minute need, per the Community Engagement Model, please reach out to the Director of Equity and/or the Community Engagement Team and the relevant DDA for immediate discussion and consideration.

This question is closely tied to the concerns we heard around flexibility. Now more than ever we know that decisions sometimes need to be made quickly, but we don't want them to be made at the expense of community members, communities' agency, or without doing a thorough racial justice analysis. These should be prioritized in all of our decision-making processes. It might take us some time to get a handle on doing this work in a different way, but our goal is that with practice this will come more naturally. As one of our CET members said, "What's an emergency in relationship building?"

What about established Relationships?

If staff already has established relationships, an ACES should be introduced to the relationship so that there is continuity in the relationship. For example, if Advocate X, the main connection to Community Group A, is out on sabbatical and an issue arises that overlaps with Community Group A, there should be someone else with an established relationship with Community Group A. An ACES can serve as that additional contact.

Staff should not feel obligated to pull back from the existing relationship. Instead, the hope is that the staff relationship expands to ACES and other advocates which will require clear communication and partnership. This method is intended to strengthen the universal relationship between the partner and CLS.

Are ACES available to do Know Your Rights Presentations?

The ACES are not excluded from facilitating know your rights trainings. However, similar to our approach to community engagement, this is not the sole responsibility of the ACES.

How do we define community?

That is a question that has been asked a lot over the last couple years. Community is defined in the model as "those affected by the systems that cause and perpetuate mass incarceration and inequities facing our immigrant populations with emphasis on people of color."

There have been some questions about the specifics of what community is and looks like. For example, is *XYZ Legal Aid* considered a community? What if the lawyer at *XYZ Legal Aid* is also a person of color and/or has been personally impacted by these systems of oppression? We understand community is hard to define. We are all parts of a community and community members. In this model we are intentionally centering communities that have been

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historically oppressed, barred from gaining political power, financial wealth, and from exercising and fulfilling their basic human rights.

To that end, we no longer explicitly center organization or legal partners. However, this also does not exclude them or bar advocacy or input from them. Instead, we encourage non-community partners to work closely with communities and we work to ensure that our work aligns with community as well.

The Community Engagement Model is intentionally broad, so we do not unintentionally exclude potential partners. As we move forward, we may be able to provide more clarity, but we ask that if you are confused about whether or not a person, group, or organization is or should be centered in our work as community – reach out the CET. We are happy to talk through the complexities.