



mosaic
opioid recovery partnership

June 2026 Webinar Resource

Mosaic Municipal Training and Technical Assistance

*Engaging People with Lived and Living Experience:
A Practical Guide for Municipal Leaders Using Opioid Settlement Funds*

Engaging People with Lived and Living Experience: A Practical Guide for Municipal Leaders Using Opioid Settlement Funds explored a variety of strategies municipalities have utilized to obtain input from people who are most affected by the opioid crisis.

Engaging people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) helps municipalities comply with state guidance. It brings critical, real-world insight that leads to better funding decisions, more effective programs, and greater community trust. Any step toward engagement is meaningful. For many municipalities, engagement strategies take time.

This webinar resource provides practical information and resources for engaging PWLLE in a variety of opioid abatement funding strategies.

Who Are People with Lived and Living Experience?

PWLLE can be [defined](#) as “people with direct, personal experience of substance use, past or present.” The definition includes people who currently use drugs, those in recovery and/or identifying as having a history of drug use, and family members.

Engaging People with Lived and Living Experience

For the first time, the FY25 [Municipal Abatement Fund Expenditure Report](#) asked municipalities that receive opioid settlement funds to self-report their level of engagement with PWLLE. These questions were added to help the state better understand how communities are centering the voices of those with direct experience of the opioid crisis, and to establish a baseline for tracking progress over time. Municipalities are currently responding, and results will inform future guidance and support.

The three levels described below are drawn from the FY25 Expenditure Report and informed by [Barnes and Schmitz's research](#) on community engagement. Meaningfully involving the people most affected by a problem often leads to programs that better reflect real needs, earn community trust, and produce lasting results. For municipalities looking to understand why PWLLE engagement matters and how different levels of engagement play out in practice, they are encouraged to read the full article.

The levels below are described in order of depth and impact. These levels are not always linear, and it may be helpful to think of them as a way to assess or identify where your municipality is today and where you might want to go next. Some municipalities will move in and out of these levels at different times, as needs and local resources change.



Note on Starting Points: It is common for municipalities to be at the beginning of this work. Many communities have not yet engaged PWLLE or have only informed them of decisions without gathering meaningful input. These are both common starting points. If your municipality is here, the most important next step is opening a channel for structured input. See the "If You Only Do One Thing" section below.

Level One: Consulted During Decision-Making

A municipality takes steps to develop relationships with PWLLE, with the goal of including their voice in planning activities in a meaningful way. This level includes conducting activities such as listening sessions, focus groups, interviews, and structured feedback opportunities. During this phase, input is actively sought before decisions are made, not after, as part of planning efforts. Activities during this phase may also include developing or deepening collaborations with community-based and peer-run organizations. These types of community agencies can support and enhance connections with PWLLE.

Level Two: Involved in Decision-Making

A municipality aims to establish genuine collaboration with PWLLE and involve them in developing solutions and making decisions together. This builds on level one and adds individual PWLLE participating in grant review or planning committees in ongoing roles with real influence. Sustained partnerships with community-based, peer-run organizations deepen this collaboration, reflecting a shared commitment to solutions grounded in real-world experience.

Level Three: Empowered to Lead

A municipality seeks to create deeper collaboration where PWLLE lead decision-making and share ownership of outcomes. This builds on levels one and two and adds PWLLE in formal roles within decision-making bodies, such as voting rights or the ability to shape or approve decisions. Municipalities provide institutional backing and funding for PWLLE-led initiatives. This level demonstrates commitment to equity, shared responsibility, and trusted partnership.

Tips for Strong Engagement:

Meaningful PWLLE engagement works best when municipalities approach it as a genuine partnership. Compensating PWLLE for their time signals that their expertise is valued (see the Quick Compensation Guide below). Removing logistical barriers like transportation, flexible scheduling, and accessible locations opens the door to broader participation. Partnering with trusted community-based organizations, peer recovery programs, and harm reduction organizations builds on existing relationships and strengthens trust. Using plain language in all materials helps ensure everyone can fully participate. And when municipalities share back how input shaped decisions, people stay engaged.



If You Only Do One Thing:

Host a single, paid 90-minute listening session or focus group with 6-8 PWLLE to ask "What is the biggest gap in services? What should we NOT fund?" Within 30 days, adjust one funding priority in response to feedback. Share a one-page or verbal summary with participants.

Quick Compensation Guide:

- **Per Session:** \$50-\$75, depending on length and input level.
- **Ongoing Roles:** Higher or recurring compensation.
- **Form of Payment:** Cash or gift cards (Visa/grocery).
- **Administration of Funds:** It's often difficult for a municipality to pay individuals directly. An option is to contract with a trusted community-based organization to distribute stipends.
- **Tax Implications:** Payments over \$600/year per person may be reportable as income – check with your financial team.

Useful Links and How to Apply Them

The resources below support municipalities at every level of PWLLE engagement. Some offer practical tools for gathering community input, such as survey templates and focus group guides; others provide frameworks for recruiting PWLLE, assessing readiness, and deepening engagement over time. Taken together, they complement the three levels described in this guide and can help municipalities take concrete next steps, no matter where they are starting.

Example Municipal Opioid Abatement Survey Templates

[Example One](#): Boston | [Example Two](#): Hampshire County | [Example Three](#): Lynn

What it offers: Real-world examples of opioid abatement surveys to help identify needs and prioritize, including demographics and service gaps.

Apply this: Distribute paper AND online surveys through a range of channels to reach people most impacted by the opioid crisis. Share via peer support organizations, harm reduction and syringe service programs, reentry programs, community health centers, and faith communities. Use results to create a ranked list of top funding priorities.

[Amherst, MA Survey Results](#)

What it offers: A real-world example of transparent survey reporting on service gaps, priority populations, and funding preferences.

Apply this: After conducting your survey, create a one-page summary like Amherst's. Share it publicly and note how each finding will (or will not) be addressed.

[SAMHSA Focus Group Toolkit](#)

What it offers: A step-by-step guide to planning, conducting, and analyzing focus groups with community members, including guidance on recruiting participants, developing discussion questions, removing barriers to participation, and compensating attendees.

Apply this: Use this toolkit before hosting a listening session or focus group with PWLLE. The discussion guide templates and facilitator tips are especially useful for municipalities new to this kind of engagement.

CHCS Meaningful Engagement Guide

What it offers: Five levels of engagement (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Share Power), compensation scales, and a readiness checklist.

Apply this: Apply the readiness checklist to your municipality. Choose one engagement level, take the next steps, and reevaluate as you progress.

ASPE Strategies to Identify People with Lived Experience

What it offers: A three-part framework for recruiting PWLLE, including how to build trust proactively and track who you are and are not reaching.

Apply this: Before launching the engagement, complete the planning questions on page 2 (e.g., which perspectives are typically under- or overrepresented?). Use the partner types listed (coalitions, community partners) to build a recruitment network. Post flyers in public places AND use social media or listservs. Track who you are reaching using a simple spreadsheet.

Massachusetts Opioid Abatement Guidance

For state guidance on opioid abatement terms, municipal payments, and settlement requirements, visit the [Mosaic Municipal TTA Resource Page](#).

Get Technical Assistance

For additional support on engaging PWLLE, or to request general training and technical assistance (TTA), please visit [Mosaic's Municipal TTA website](#) or email MuniTTA@rizema.org.



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