



Harvard T.H. Chan

COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

The Community Engaged Learning Fellowships Program
Principles and Practice



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Office of Field Education
and Practice



Community Engaged
Learning

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Overview and Purpose

The complex nature of public health calls for deep and continued engagement with the communities most impacted by its challenges. Public health research and practice requires scholars and practitioners alike to obtain the skills and experience needed to work collaboratively, equitably, and effectively with stakeholders directly involved in addressing issues that impact their communities' health and wellbeing. Public health education has the unique and important opportunity to offer students field-based learning and training to sharpen these skills in collaboration and community engagement (Levin, Bowie, Ragsdale, et al. 2021).

At Harvard Chan, community engaged learning and scholarship serve an essential role in public health education, offering students an opportunity to exercise ethical and authentic engagement with community partners and stakeholders. Based on a service learning framework (Furco, 1996), students engage in their applied practice and research endeavors through a process of listening to learn, critical reflection, and attention to contexts and social systems – crucial skills in public health practice and leadership development.

Community engaged learning opportunities:

- are developed, implemented, and evaluated collaboratively in community;
- respond to community-identified concerns and priorities;
- balance the service that is provided and the learning that takes place; and
- provide opportunities for ongoing critical reflection, examining social issues by situating the self within a community setting.

The purpose of this handbook is to:

- **Articulate** the rationale and theoretical foundations of community engaged learning in public health education
- **Position** community engaged learning as essential to promoting health equity, social justice, and social responsibility
- **Describe** the programmatic components and pedagogical principles of community engaged learning
- **Provide** a practical guide for implementing a community engaged learning fellowship program within, and as a complement to, broader public health education



Community Engaged Learning Fellowships

Community Engaged Learning (CEL) Fellowships at Harvard Chan support students and postdoctoral fellows across the school and in all degree programs to be involved in community engaged research and practice. These field-based opportunities offer fellows practice in centering community-identified priorities and grappling with issues around power, privilege, and positionality as they develop their projects. Through a cohort-based model, fellows are also invited to initiate new connections with peers to share observations, questions, and challenges and to reflect collectively on their approaches to research and practice.

Harvard Chan's Office of Educational Programs offers three fellowship opportunities for students interested in community engaged learning: the Rose Service Learning Fellowship, the Herbert S. Winokur, Jr. Fellowship in Public Health for the Mississippi Delta, and the Global Mental Health Fellowship. Together, the CEL Fellowships aim to:

1. Address community-identified needs, working in partnership with the community and partner organizations
2. Cultivate a community-centered approach to public health research and practice, including a deeper commitment to addressing structural determinants of health outcomes
3. Develop and strengthen reciprocal relationships between Harvard Chan and the organizations and communities where engaged learning projects take place



What are the differences between the CEL Fellowships?

The **Rose Service Learning Fellowship** provides funding support for students and postdoctoral fellows to travel and engage in service learning projects. Projects are co-designed with the hosting community partner. This fellowship is awarded in the Fall and Spring annually.

The **Herbert S. Winokur, Jr. Fellowship in Public Health for the Mississippi Delta** and the **Global Mental Health Fellowship** are summer field practice opportunities with established partnering organizations in the respective locations. Winokur Fellows are based in Mississippi (MS) and work on projects that address health and economic development in the MS Delta region. Global Mental Health (GMH) Fellows are based in southern Uganda to work with the John C. Kelly Clinic in Kabale.

The scope of work for individual Winokur and GMH fellows is co-developed through meetings and conversations between prospective applicants, the program staff, and partnering organizations. In contrast, the Rose Service Learning Fellowship requires applicants to negotiate the scope of work independently and submit a proposal, workplan, and budget that is competitively reviewed for funding.

How are the fellowships similar?

Fellows form a learning community through the CEL Fellowships Program where they are introduced to the program's framework and commit to community engaged learning principles and practices (see more details below).




Community Engaged
Learning

Framework

Community engaged learning combines the practice of community engagement with an intention to take the role of a "learner" in the field.

More commonly referred to as "service learning" or "experiential education," this type of pedagogy entails the practice of applying skills and knowledge acquired from the classroom by working in collaboration with a community partner. Distinct from internships, community service, or volunteerism, **community engaged learning moves toward a more "critical approach,"** one that emphasizes redistribution of power among all members of the engaged learning relationship, development of authentic relationships in the classroom and in the community, and work from a social change perspective (Mitchell, 2008).



Community engaged learning requires:

- A willingness and desire to get to know people,
- Learning about the issues communities face and the systems and structures that create and sustain them,
- Acknowledging our own identities and the identities of those we meet in the community,
- Challenging our own assumptions and beliefs, and
- Recognizing concerns and challenges, as well as strengths and assets.

(Donahue and Plaxton-Moore, 2018)

Learning takes place through iterative cycles of action and critical reflection.



Community Engaged Learning: The Three P's

Community Engaged Learning requires fellows to take on the **posture** of a learner, to articulate one's **positionality** in relation to the issue being addressed, and a willingness to be **proximal** to the people most impacted by issue. The practice of critical reflection is emphasized to challenge assumptions and beliefs and make meaning of the learning experience.

01 Posture

of a learner, meaningful, deliberate engagement, listening to learn, community partners are the experts

02 Proximity

we cannot learn adequately without getting close, traveling to, immersing in, engaging in organic conversations

03 Positionality

understanding how our own social identities can limit, bias, and/or add to our meaning-making processes, interpretations; and appreciation of the identities of our community partners

Critical Reflection

as a practice and as a learning tool to make sense of experiences and learn further about the issues and about self

Critical Reflection Framework

What

What happened?

So What

What did you learn?

Now What

How will you apply the learning?

Critical reflection is an extension of “critical thinking”. It asks us to think about our practice and ideas and then it challenges us to step-back and examine our thinking by asking probing questions. It asks us to not only delve into the past and look at the present but importantly it asks us to speculate about the future and act. ([Department of Education and Training Victoria, Australia](#))

Community Engaged
Learning Fellowships

Notes



Community Engaged
Learning

Program

**Community Engaged Learning Fellows
are part of Learning Communities,
both at School and in the Field**

As a comprehensive program, CEL fellows commit to participating actively in preparing for and reflecting on community engagement, both with a community of learners in the fellowship as well as communities of practice in the field. Learning begins at orientation, iterates in the field, and is reflected on during a debrief as fellows return to school.



**Critical Reflection. Peer-to-Peer Learning.
Knowledge Sharing.**



Pedagogical Principles

Orientation

- Take on the **posture** of a learner, seek **proximity** to people and contexts, and gain awareness of **positionality**
- Practice **critical reflection**, unearthing personal biases and assumptions
- Consider **multiple ways of knowing**, and a paradigm shift in knowledge production
- **Storytelling** as a scientific approach

In the Field

- Learn as an **iterative practice** of reflection and action
- **Pause to reflect** on sense-making with writing and journaling exercises
- **Share knowledge** with community of learners through web-based posts

Debrief

- Tell personal stories of community engaged learning experience and **retell stories**, with power and with community
- **Make meaning** of events and experiences for **transformative learning**
- Pass along **lessons learned** to future fellows

Community Engaged
Learning Fellowships

Notes



Resources for Further Learning

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