

Partnering is Essential to Trauma-Informed Care: Centering and Compensating Lived Expertise

There are numerous ways to interact with this document. Here's one strategy to help you make the most of its content:

- 1** **FAMILIARIZE:** Read *Partnering is Essential (PIE) to Trauma-Informed Care: Centering and Compensating Lived Expertise* from beginning to end. This should take around 20 minutes to complete.
- 2** **REFLECT:** Set a timer for 10 minutes and think about what you read. Use the Reflection Worksheet to jot down your thoughts.
- 3** **SHARE & DISCUSS:** Talk about your individual reflections and ways pay is vital to both equity work and being trauma-informed.
- 4** **SET GOALS:** Establish goals for how you want to use what you've read and discussed to create change.
- 5** **REVIEW & ADJUST:** Schedule a time to review your progress on the goal and adjust as needed. If there are new team members involved, make sure to include them in the process.

Why is it important to talk about pay equity as part of trauma-informed care?

In our efforts to ensure equity within trauma-informed care, it is crucial to pay attention to whether our pay practices reflect our values. Traditionally, rates of pay are influenced by principles and practices rooted in prioritizing formal education and training, while devaluing other ways of knowing. Experiences that come from navigating traumatic events, from one's culture, or from sharing an identity with historically marginalized communities are not seen as the expertise that they are. This approach worsens existing inequalities because:

- It places the responsibility for advocating for change on those who are already marginalized and harmed by the existing systems.
- It undermines our ability to create partnerships.
- It clearly gives advantages to those who benefit from systemic inequity and perpetuates the disadvantages of those who do not.

Why is it important to talk about equitable pay now?

More than 15 years ago, the NCTSN began talking about pay as a vital component to partnering and developing future leaders. While the breadth and depth of partnering has grown in the Network, pay practices were given inadequate attention. We have seen too many instances of those who lead with lived experience serving on grants as peers, advisory board members, and consultants while continuing to struggle with poverty, housing insecurity, and working multiple jobs just to survive.

If we can successfully address pay equity, we will have overcome one of the most significant barriers to efforts aimed at addressing social justice, creating partnerships, and thus successfully engaging in trauma-informed work.

“If folks with lived experience can't afford to get to the table, or stay there for any length of time, very little change will ever be possible.”

Addressing Common Barriers to Equitable Pay

We believe it is possible, essential, and our collective responsibility to make changes in how and what we pay lived experience experts. We also recognize this work requires creativity and a commitment to step-by-step improvement rather than an all or nothing approach.

We know that people interested in elevating the voices of those who lead with lived experience may already be working hard or feel like they are doing the best they can. Our goal is to bolster those efforts by sharing examples of how others are working to improve pay practices.

Below are some common barriers trauma-informed organizations face alongside ways organizations are striving to improve and really put forth an effort for change.

“ This is a 'both/and' situation for me. I want people to take pride in their current work while also inspiring them to explore new ideas and approaches for further progress. ”

Scenario 1: An agency knows that partnering with those who lead with lived experience is an essential component of being trauma-informed. At the same time, they haven't set aside money to pay those lived experts for their time and expertise.

Real World Creativity

1 We couldn't pay people under the age of 18, our university wouldn't let us. Instead, we offered 'payment in kind' and did things like help with financial aid applications, job references, or 'work study' options for high school students. Eventually, we were able to subcontract with a community agency that could pay our experts under the age of 18. These were not quick or easy solutions. It felt so much better than choosing to either exploit youth or not hear from those whose voices are most critical to our success.

2 I realized I needed foster parents to help me refine a better approach to delivering a parenting program focused on trauma. When I asked families for input, they provided fantastic ideas and even offered to assist in teaching the course! I was on salary but there was initially no budget for the new program. All I could offer was training credit toward their foster parent license. However, as our program gained recognition, I secured funding for some of the parents to attend national conferences and talk about our work. Additionally, I connected these parents with other agencies interested in launching similar programs. Over time, several of them began conducting our training independently and earning as much as any other trainer.

Scenario 2: An agency has a budget for paying families and young adults to work in partnership on a project. At the same time, the budget is not sufficient to fully pay for the amount of work that needs to be done.

Real World Creativity

1 Our agency worked together with some of our family and young adult partners to develop a list of the work people who lead with lived experience often do for our agency. We then created a short-term task force to come up with an average number of hours each task typically takes. This helped us get closer to paying folks for the time they spend, not just the time we can afford.

2 Every time we start a project, the first thing we do is ask about the budget. GED or PhD, we pay all our consultants the same hourly rate. This makes it easy to do the math and know, up front, how many hours of time we can afford, so we can plan the project accordingly.

Scenario 3: An agency is committed to paying people with lived experience and has set aside funding, however the mechanics of getting people paid create hardships for the payees.

Real World Creativity

1 We work in a small non-profit and have a lot of flexibility. Our HR person was able to create a Pay Pal account and pay people that way. Now we don't have to figure out how to get people paid if they don't have a mailing address or are afraid to give that information.

2 We ask people how they'd prefer to be compensated for their time and expertise. Some prefer a gift card while some find that insulting so we always ask and try to honor their preference.

Non-Negotiables for Partnering

We offer the following non-negotiable guiding principles as a framework to help agencies continue to prioritize trauma-informed equitable pay practices when faced with real-world decisions and constraints.



Equitable Pay Reflection

Walking the Walk

Self-reflection is a key component toward change. If you do not discuss compensation with those with lived experience, you won't have all the data you need to make informed decisions. Focus your thinking toward equitable pay as you read the tables below. *Use the worksheet on Appendix B to write and reflect on your thoughts.*

PRIORITIZE TRANSPARENCY			
Do you think your organization's pay practices are transparent?			
NO: Our process for deciding what and how we pay people is hard to understand, only our finance person ever really knows.	SOMEWHAT: We tell an individual what we are going to pay them (and only them) before they begin work with us.	MOSTLY: We let people know before they work with us what they and everyone else working on the project will be paid.	YES: What and how we pay people is widely known and easily accessible.

PRACTICE MUTUALITY		
Do you, or your organization, practice mutuality?		
NO: We haven't given much thought to supporting experts with lived experience beyond financial pay.	SOMEWHAT: Mutuality certainly happens but it's mostly case-by-case and we leave it to the lived experts to leverage the opportunities rather than make mutuality an agency responsibility.	YES: We use a scope of work for every project. As part of building the scope of work, we ask partners what they would like to get out of the experience beyond payment and then add those ideas to the organization's list of commitments.

VALUE ALL SOURCES OF WISDOM		
Does your organization pay people based on the work being done (instead of the title of the person doing it)?		
NO: Providers and people with lived experience have completely different pay scales.	SOMEWHAT: We determine pay based on professional experience and degrees, resulting in those with lived experience typically receiving the lowest wages.	YES: Once we determine someone is qualified for a task, we pay them the exact same as everyone doing the task regardless of their source of wisdom.

SHIFT THE BURDEN TO ADAPT TO THOSE WHO HOLD THE MOST POWER		
When faced with challenges paying partners with lived experience, does your organization own the responsibility to change?		
YES/NO: If we don't have a budget to pay people with lived experience, the organization works to find other funding rather than ask families to volunteer their time.	YES/NO: If people with lived experience have challenges with payment methods - no bank account for example - the organization finds a solution to accommodate rather than eliminating that person as a potential partner.	YES/NO: The organization builds in costs of transportation, childcare and the like into pay costs rather than expecting families who are already marginalized to absorb those expenses.

Conclusion:

For those who have more power and privilege, it can be distressing to realize that you've been part of a system that creates barriers for basic resources, like the chance to be valued and heard. This document aims to encourage and support those with privilege to go beyond feeling stuck and start making change.

“Why should I get paid less than someone with 10 years as a social worker? I grew up in foster care, I should be given credit for at least 18+ years of experience in child welfare. In fact, I should have a PhD in child welfare.”

We recognize often this is a both/and situation:

Systems change requires all of us.	This work can feel large and overwhelming.	Pay is a small piece of social justice and trauma-informed work.	We can take pride in the work we are already doing.
both/and	both/and	both/and	both/and
Each of us has something within our control that we can contribute to change.	Small steps are powerful.	Pay can be a significant catalyst for change.	We can recognize we have room for improvement.

We hope that putting a focus on pay will be a step toward doing better.

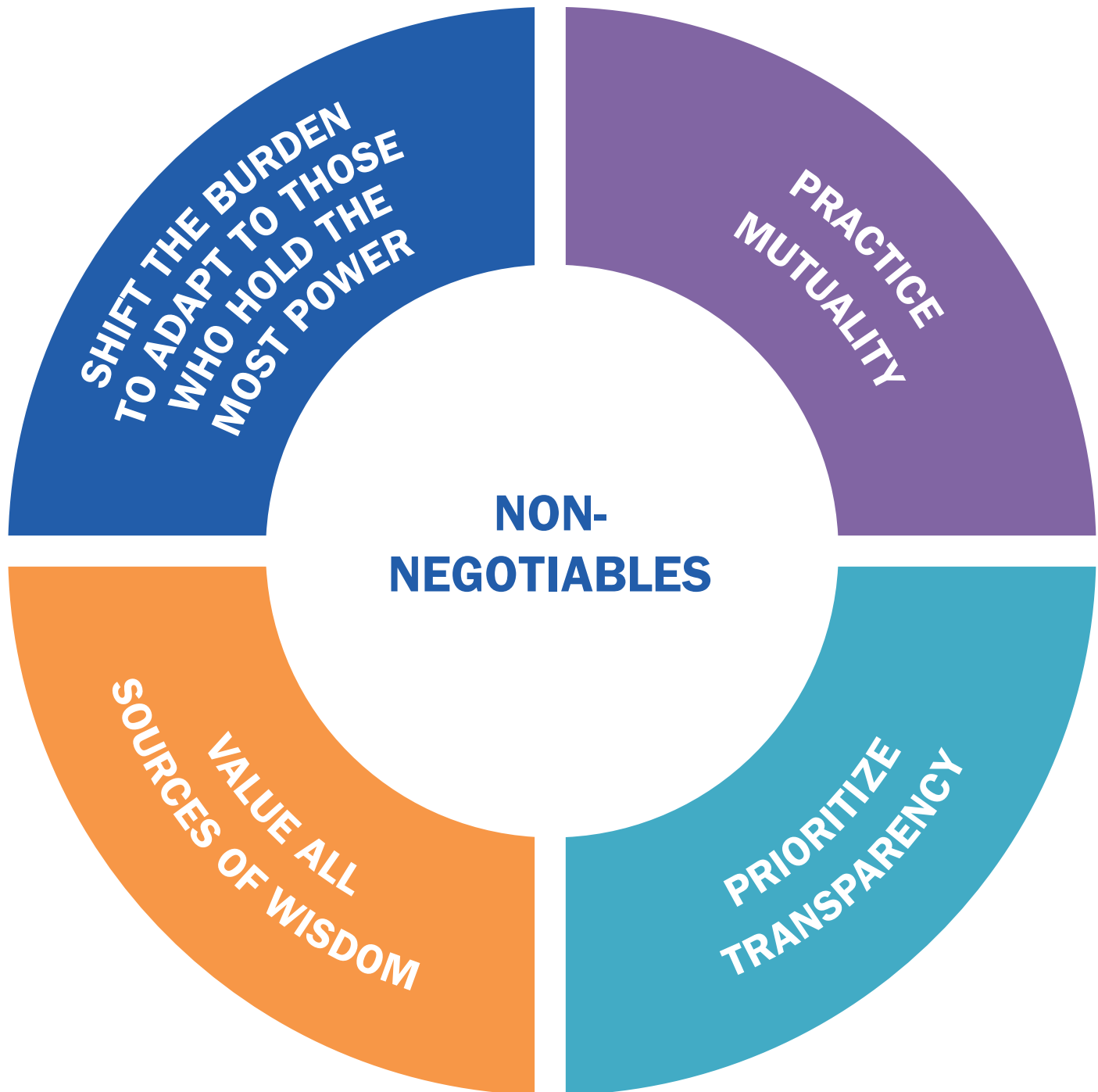
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APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B: EQUITABLE PAY REFLECTION WORKSHEET

PRIORITIZE TRANSPARENCY			
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ACTION STEPS:

What can you do on your own to increase pay **transparency**?

Are there other champions for partnering, equity, or trauma-informed practice in your organization or in your community? If so, how might they be **allies in increasing transparency** as a shared goal?

PRACTICE MUTUALITY		
Do you, or your organization, practice mutuality?		
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ACTION STEPS:

What can you personally do to increase **mutuality**?

What strategies could you use to make it easier to engage in mutuality more often? Think working smarter, not working harder, building on what you already do rather than adding more work.

VALUE ALL SOURCES OF WISDOM

Does your organization pay people based on the work being done (instead of the title of the person doing it)?

NO: Providers and people with lived experience have completely different pay scales.

SOMEWHAT: We determine pay based on professional experience and degrees, resulting in those with lived experience typically receiving the lowest wages.

YES: Once we determine someone is qualified for a task, we pay them the exact same as everyone doing the task regardless of their source of wisdom.

ACTION STEPS:

What power or influence do I have to pay people for the task being done?
Who else in your agency is working to address pay?
How might defining this as an issue make change more possible?

SHIFT THE BURDEN TO ADAPT TO THOSE WHO HOLD THE MOST POWER

When faced with challenges paying partners with lived experience, does your organization own the responsibility to change?

YES/NO: If we don't have a budget to pay people with lived experience, the organization works to find other funding rather than ask families to volunteer their time.

YES/NO: If people with lived experience have challenges with payment methods - no bank account for example - the organization finds a solution to accommodate rather than eliminating that person as a potential partner.

YES/NO: The organization builds in costs of transportation, childcare and the like into pay costs rather than expecting families who are already marginalized to absorb those expenses.

ACTION STEPS:

Notice when your organization says things like, "There's nothing we can do," and reframe it as an equity issue.
Ask questions such as, "how could we be spending our privilege in this situation?"
Consider, what burdens do families currently carry that the agency could assume instead?
