

# Community Equity Pipeline Practice Guide

AN INITIATIVE OF WILDER PUBLIC POLICY



# What is the Community Equity Pipeline practice guide?

The Community Equity Pipeline (CEP) practice guide is an overview of our practice. It describes our values (why we use this approach), the CEP journey (what we do), and the outcomes of CEP (what our cohort members learn). Our hope is that it is useful for CEP cohort members, for people interested in participating CEP, for organizations who are interested in replicating the CEP model, and for others who are generally interested in how we go about teaching members of our community how to be more effective legislative advocates. We hope this guide clearly explains what we do in an accessible way so that readers can readily grasp what our CEP practice is. We are happy to answer any questions you might have. Please contact Dominic McQuerry at [dominic.mcquerry@wilder.org](mailto:dominic.mcquerry@wilder.org) with questions about the CEP program.

## What will you find in the CEP practice guide?

This practice guide provides information on the following aspects of the CEP practice: 1) who we are and what CEP stands for, 2) the CEP journey, and 3) the outcomes of CEP. The first section describes our philosophy and values. The second section describes what we do throughout the CEP journey: grounding in personal values, learning skills, practicing skills, reflecting on learning and practice, and celebrating and evaluating. The third section describes the outcomes of our CEP practice: increased knowledge of legislative structure and process, increased legislative advocacy skills, and expanded network of community and policy connections.

## Why did we make this guide?

We hope that this guide is useful in many ways. First, we hope that it is useful for explaining CEP to new cohort members – or to people who are interested in participating in CEP – what we do and what they will learn. We also hope it is useful for past cohort members to communicate and teach others about how to take effective legislative action. Additionally, we hope that it is useful as a starting point for other organizations who want to start their own practice of sharing knowledge and strategies to powerfully engage in public policy decision making.

## How did we make this guide?

We partnered with Wilder Research to make this practice guide. They reviewed our program materials, interviewed CEP staff and previous cohort members, and had many conversations with us to create this guide. For more information about the CEP program, please contact Dominic McQuerry at [dominic.mcquerry@wilder.org](mailto:dominic.mcquerry@wilder.org). For more information about this practice guide or how it was put together, please contact Ryan Evans at [ryan.evans@wilder.org](mailto:ryan.evans@wilder.org).



# What is CEP?

CEP is a 10-month opportunity for nonprofit professionals of color and indigenous leaders who want to become more actively engaged in legislative decision-making at the Capitol. At its core, CEP teaches cohort members how to be more effective legislative advocates. We designed the CEP program after doing five community design sessions with community leaders with significant community organizing and legislative advocacy experience. We also talked with 50 key players at the state legislature. We used what we learned from these community design sessions and these conversations to ensure that the program accomplishes two goals: 1) cohort members are meaningfully engaged by the program and build relationships with other cohort members; and 2) cohort members learn actionable and useful legislative advocacy skills that they can incorporate into their professional work. CEP is grounded in our values, which are: maintaining authenticity; transparency about the legislative process; immersive, practical learning; honoring collective wisdom; and amplifying the voices of people of color and indigenous people at the Capitol.



## OUR VALUES

### Maintaining authenticity

The CEP journey starts with cohort members exploring their personal values with other cohort members. CEP starts this way because reflecting on these personal values – and how they align or not with the culture of the legislative process – is a focus of the program. Every meeting, cohort members reflect on what they experienced, and how their personal values do or do not align with the values they observe at the Capitol. We know that maintaining authenticity is vitally important for staying “in the game” long-term.

### Transparency about the legislative process

Our staff are upfront about the fact that cohort members will most likely experience some difficulty engaging with the legislative process. In particular, the legislative process – and the Capitol – is largely absent of people of color and indigenous people. Cohort members may experience emotional and psychological pain engaging with a system from which they and people from their communities have been systemically excluded.

### Immersive, practical learning

CEP prioritizes an immersive, practical learning experience because they want cohort members to be comfortable at the Capitol as well as readily apply a variety of legislative action strategies. As part of the CEP program, cohort members are immersed in the legislative process at the Capitol. Cohort members not only have conversations with many legislators and other stakeholders, they also learn about a multitude of ways to influence the legislative process.

### Honoring collective wisdom

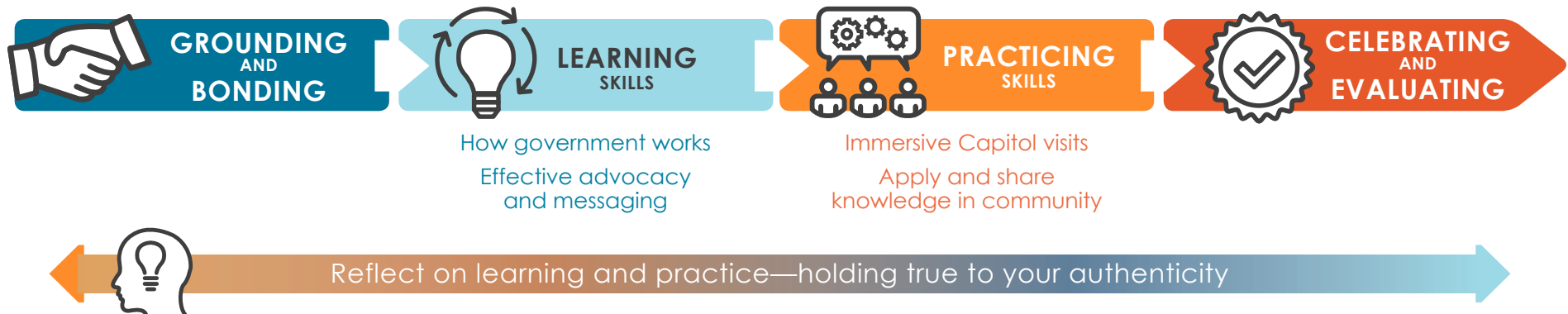
CEP builds on the deep experience that cohort members already have when they start the CEP program. Cohort members come with expertise in many professional fields as well as community networks that run wide and deep. The CEP program intentionally asks about these experiences so that cohort members’ explore how their expertise can be utilized for effective legislative action. The CEP program is designed so that cohort members learn from each other as well as from CEP staff.

### Amplifying voices of color and indigenous voices at the Capitol

Our staff believe in amplifying the voices of people of color and indigenous people at the Capitol because these voices have been traditionally excluded from the legislative process. We believe that by including voices that are new to the Capitol, our cohort members will make way for innovative legislative action that will redefine how laws are made in Minnesota. In short, the CEP program was designed in opposition to white supremacy.

# What is the CEP journey?

The CEP journey starts with cohort members grounding themselves in their personal values. Then, cohort members learn important skills that they will practice when the legislative session begins, focusing on how state government works and effective advocacy for legislative action. When the legislative session begins, cohort members will practice these skills through coalition advocacy activities (strategy, legislative visits, communications, community engagement, etc.) aimed at advancing a piece of legislation through the process. Through CEP, cohort members reflect on what they learn and their experiences at the legislature; in particular, cohort members reflect on their personal values and how they align – or do not align – with the culture of the Capitol and the legislative process. Lastly, cohort members celebrate their time in the program, and evaluate the program.



## 1. GROUNDING AND BONDING

### Meet your cohort

CEP staff host a retreat so that cohort members can get to know each other; cohort members begin working on “group agreements” detailing how to ensure that their CEP experience is characterized by being a part of a meaningful learning community

### Who are you?

Cohort members discuss the roles they have (in their communities, in their professional lives, in their personal lives, in their hobbies or other extra-curricular activities); cohort members draw connections between the different roles they have and why they are interested in participating in CEP

### What is CEP?

CEP staff describe the program structure, learning goals, practice goals, and reflection goals; cohort members have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the program and its goals



## 2. LEARNING SKILLS – BEFORE THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS



<b>Levels of government</b>	Cohort members learn about different levels of government, such as federal, state, county, and local governments – and the roles that these different levels of government have in the lives of constituents
<b>Government structure</b>	Cohort members learn about the branches of government, including judicial, executive, and legislative branches – and the roles the different branches play in the legislative process
<b>Law-making process and legislative timeline</b>	Cohort members learn about how bills become laws, the role that committees play in the law-making process, and different ways of influencing bills as they become law; cohort members become familiar with the 2-year legislative timeline
<b>Getting to know the Capitol</b>	Cohort members have introductory meetings with legislators, partisan and non-partisan staff at the Capitol; cohort members become familiar with the physical space of the Capitol
<b>Key players in the legislature</b>	Cohort members learn about critical actors for the upcoming legislative session, including senate leadership, house leadership, governor's office staff, and non-partisan staff
<b>Government finances</b>	Cohort members learn about the legislative budgeting process and how government agencies use and distribute government funds



### EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AND MESSAGING

<b>Different facets of advocacy—direct lobbying, community organizing, leveraging media</b>	Cohort members learn about direct lobbying (communicating directly with legislators), grassroots lobbying (community organizing around an issue and facilitating communication between community members and legislators), and leveraging media for advocacy purposes
<b>Community engagement</b>	Cohort members learn about various levels of community engagement and determine which level will be most strategic for legislative issues that are important to them
<b>Messaging with intention</b>	Cohort members learn how to craft effective messages so that their legislative issues are aligned with the interests of key legislative players and “do right” by their communities
<b>Authenticity and legislative action</b>	Cohort members reflect about their own values and maintaining their authenticity while effectively messaging to legislators who may not share their values



### 3. PRACTICING SKILLS – DURING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION



#### **Immersive Capitol visits**

Cohort members meet with legislators about their chosen issue; cohort members practice different legislative visit scenarios, such as scenarios in which legislators are historically supportive of their issue, legislators are new to their issue, and legislators are historically opposed to their issue; cohort members also meet with non-partisan Capitol staff and learn about their role in creating legislation

#### **Applying and sharing learnings in community**

Cohort members begin incorporating what they learn from the CEP program into their ongoing professional work, such as including information about the legislative timeline in their community engagement work or teaching young people in a youth program they run about the legislative process and how bills become laws; in applying what they learn in their own professional contexts, members consider what level of community engagement is best for their audience, what is most important for their communities or constituents to learn about the legislative process, and how to prepare their communities or constituents to remain true to their personal values if they choose to engage in legislative advocacy



### 4. REFLECTING ON LEARNING AND PRACTICE

#### **Session reflections**

During each session, CEP staff ask questions that intentionally allow cohort members to reflect on what they are learning and practicing; these session reflections focus on 1) how the culture of the legislative process aligns – or does not align – with the personal values that cohort members hold, and 2) personal learnings about how to be more effective legislative advocates, such as adjusting their message for the audience they are speaking to



### 5. CELEBRATING AND EVALUATING

#### **Graduation**

At the end of the CEP program, CEP staff host a graduation ceremony that celebrates the cohort members and everything that they have achieved while in the program

#### **Evaluation interviews**

At the end of the CEP program, cohort members participate in interviews that prompt reflection about what cohort members have learned and how they have grown as a result of being in CEP; cohort members have the opportunity to suggest improvements to the program

# What are the outcomes of CEP?

Since CEP first began, we have partnered with Wilder Research to document the outcomes of the program. Our evaluations have highlighted a number of consistent outcomes of the CEP program, which include increased knowledge of legislative structure and process, increased legislative advocacy skills, and an expanded network of community and policy connections to support future advocacy work. The summary findings below are from an evaluation of the 2016-17 CEP program.

## **Increased knowledge of legislative structure and process**

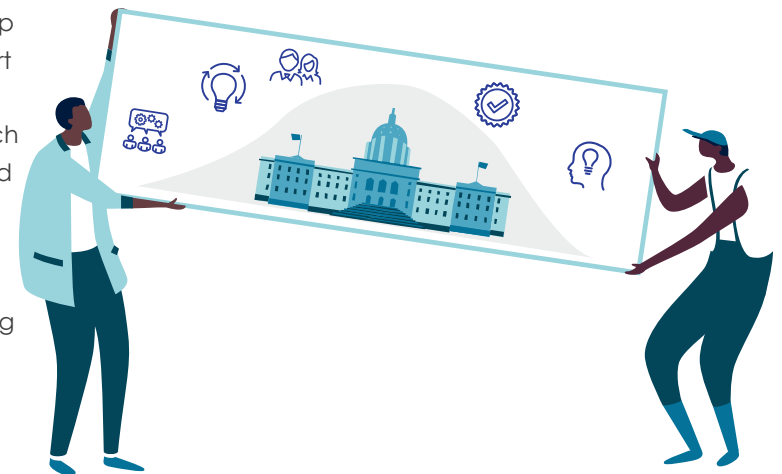
Participating in CEP helped demystify the legislative process for cohort members while allowing them to support one another as a community. Prior to participating in CEP, cohort members experienced the following barriers in engaging in state politics: lack of knowledge about the process, not knowing the space, and mistrust and misconceptions of the government. It should be noted that it may take multiple rounds of the program to truly understand all the nuances of the legislative process.

## **Increased legislative advocacy skills**

The majority of cohort members felt more confident in their ability to translate technical legislative language into accessible terms for community members, leading a training on legislative advocacy, and leading a group of community members to engage at the State Capitol. Many of the cohort members who did not report increased confidence in these areas already had experience doing this work. In interviews, cohort members also reported success in engaging community members in their efforts. This involved community events and bringing community members to committee meetings and Day at the Hill. Members felt that participating in CEP increased their ability to engage community members. One member noted that CEP increased their confidence in this work and their understanding of how important community voices are. It should be noted that cohort members experienced difficulties connecting with some legislators due to legislators' busy schedules, which was a particular difficulty for cohort members with full-time jobs.

## **Expanded network of community and policy connections**

Participating in the CEP program allowed members to develop new relationships, both with Capitol staff and with other cohort members. While not all relationships were deep, members noted they know who people are by name and can approach them to discuss issues. Some cohort members even established numerous policy relationships in their field after years of professional experience in their field. Members discussed how difficult it is to build relationships and how it takes constant effort and attention. They noted this is still a barrier to engaging at the Capitol as much as they would like.





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June 2018