



**ROBERT LEE
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SEMINAR**

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Hogg Foundation *for* Mental Health

A photograph showing a woman and a young child walking away from the camera on a gravel path. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue denim shirt and black pants, holding the child's hand. The child is on the left, wearing a red and white plaid shirt and blue jeans. They are walking through a field of purple flowers. In the background, there is a red metal fence and a line of green trees under a clear blue sky.

**WORKING
TOGETHER
FOR RURAL
WELL-BEING**

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESOURCES GUIDE

About this Resource

This guide is intended to support continued learning for people working with a community-based approach to strengthening resilience, well-being and mental health. Readers will find an overview of the sessions and themes discussed, including the frameworks, strategies and tools presented. Exercises shared in this guide can be applied to collaborative work in a variety of settings.

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Graduate students from The University of Texas at Austin's Steve Hicks School of Social Work attended the seminar to capture this learning record. In addition to the lead contributors above, we want to thank Bekah DeRosa, Ainslee Fessenden, Hannah Nazir, Emma Patterson, Clara Peretz and Bridget Tobin, as well as the research coordinator, Dr. Calvin L. Streeeter, Professor and Meadows Foundation Centennial Professor in the Quality of Life in the Rural Environment.

About the Robert Lee Sutherland Seminar

Since 1978, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health has convened this biennial seminar to increase awareness about mental health concepts, such as recovery, integrated health and barriers to well-being. Named after our first executive director, Dr. Robert Lee Sutherland, this event offers a chance for Texans to promote innovation and collaboration among providers, advocates, consumers and their families.

About the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

The foundation envisions a future in which the people of Texas thrive in communities that support mental health and well-being. Using a variety of approaches, including grantmaking, convening, research and public policy, the foundation works collaboratively to transform how communities promote mental health in everyday life. Together, we can change the patterns of mental illness and strengthen well-being across Texas, especially for marginalized populations. Established in 1940, the foundation is part of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin.

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Introduction

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

The 2019 Robert Lee Sutherland Seminar: Working Together for Rural Well-Being (RLS), held on April 24, 2019, in Bastrop, Texas, offered a space for community members, mental health providers, consumers and other stakeholders to come together and make connections, engage in thoughtful dialogue and think collectively about solutions to mental health challenges in rural communities.

Speakers shared knowledge about community-building to improve mental health outcomes and create community change, and emphasized the importance of using a community-wide perspective to identify common goals, engage a diverse group of stakeholders, include everyone in the process, and build trust in the community.

Attendees discussed some of the challenges rural communities face, including the lack of access to health care due to shortages in providers or transportation, acute and long-term effects of poverty and natural disasters, suicide rates, and the impact of the opioid epidemic. Many conversations focused on how to engage historically excluded groups in their collaborative efforts.

Key Takeaways: What We Learned

- Community collaboration and systems change takes time. It’s a marathon, not a sprint!
- Start with inclusion and trust-building. We must focus on engaging historically excluded groups and a variety of stakeholders throughout all steps of the process.
- We must look at community issues through a systems perspective and address the community conditions, structural barriers and policies that erode well-being.
- Community members are the experts! Bottom-up leadership requires listening and empowering residents to take ownership of creating the solutions.

[View all seminar resources](#), including session videos, slides, handouts and more.

[Watch this brief recap video](#) or [listen to this podcast episode](#) for reflections from attendees.

Learn more about [past seminars](#).

Well-Being and the Social Determinants of Health

In addition to physical health, well-being is encompassed by the social, emotional, spiritual and civic aspects of life that produce feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment.

The 2019 seminar explored rural mental health through a community well-being framework, highlighting how collaboratives can increase mental health outcomes by targeting their efforts on systems that affect the social determinants of health.

“The structural conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age” such as socioeconomic status, education, physical environment, employment, social support networks and access to health care are aspects of life that have a tremendous influence on a person’s overall mental health and well-being.

Several speakers discussed how longstanding policies and societal structures have reinforced systemic inequality, consequently leading to poor mental health outcomes in marginalized communities.

Sheila Savannah and Dr. Wendy Ellis underscored the critical importance of having community members at the decision-making table, while also addressing the root causes of mental health disparities.

The evidence is conclusive. Because of the impact social determinants of health and structural inequalities have on community well-being and resilience, there is an imperative for collaboratives to address the policies, procedures and practices that create and exacerbate adverse community conditions.

Quick facts about well-being.

Quick facts about social determinants of health and mental health.

Learn more about the Hogg Foundation’s approach:

- [Vision, Mission and Values](#)
- [A Shift from Mental Illness to Mental Health](#)
- [Promoting Mental Health in Everyday Life](#)
- [Strategic Focus on Communities and Collaboration](#)

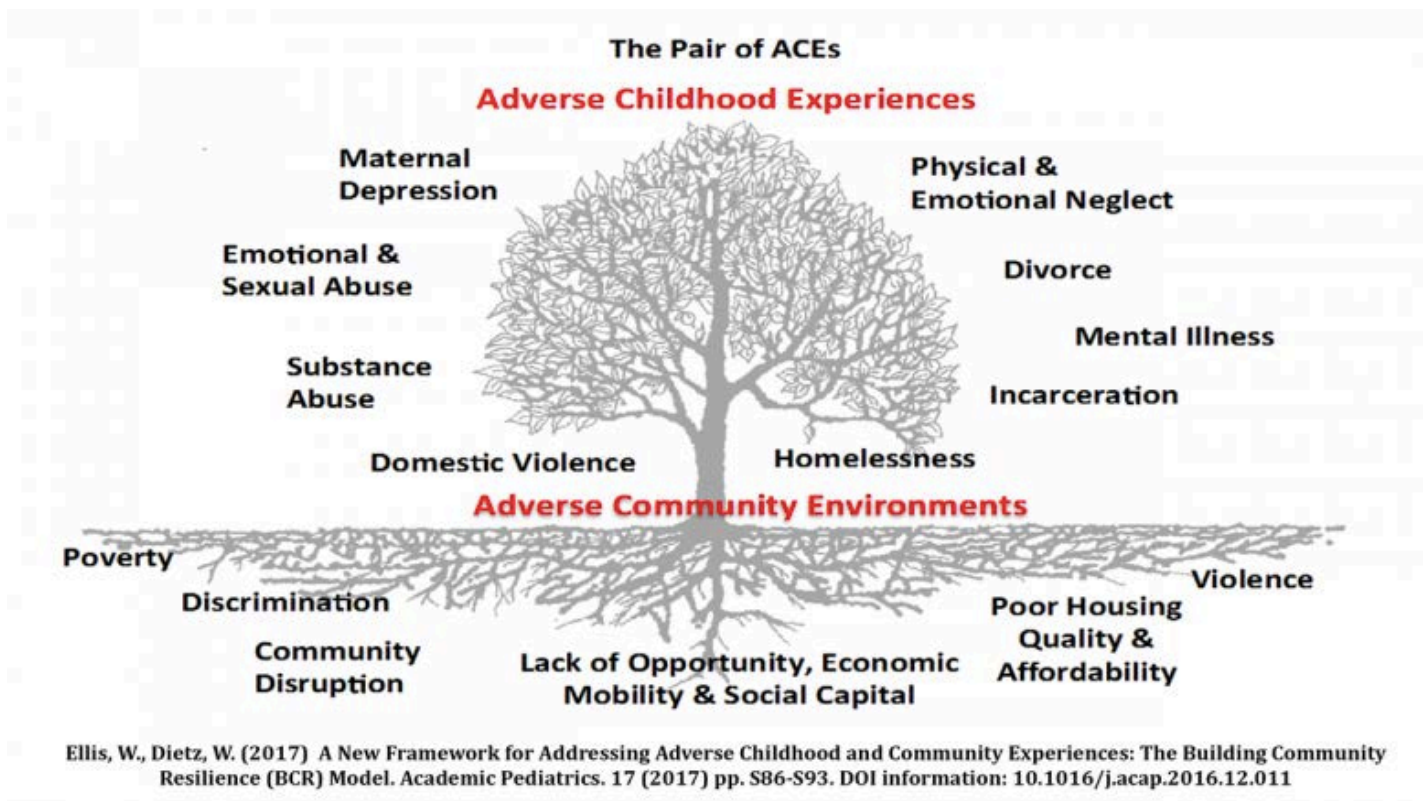
Root Causes: Addressing Health Disparities

Building Community Resilience (Dr. Wendy Ellis)

Dr. Wendy Ellis presented her [Building Community Resilience \(BCR\)](#) approach as a way to address the root causes of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments (the “Pair of ACEs”).

[In the United States, almost half of children \(45%\)](#) are subject to at least one Adverse Childhood Experience in their lifetime, defined as “abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18.” Individuals with childhood trauma have higher rates of risky behaviors such as substance use or early sexual activity and health challenges in adulthood, including depression, suicide, alcoholism and heart disease.

Addressing the root causes of the “Pair of ACEs” is fundamental to improving overall community well-being. Adverse community environments include poverty, poor housing, violence or lack of economic mobility. The BCR approach views Adverse Community Environments as the root cause of Adverse Childhood Experiences and aims to improve community conditions and increase protective factors for children and families.



Exercise | What's in Your Soil?

Materials needed: ["Pair of ACEs" worksheet](#)

Dr. Ellis encouraged attendees to think about community well-being by visualizing the root causes of adversity through the "Pair of ACEs" tree (illustrated on pg. 6). The leaves represent the symptoms of systemic issues, such as significant high school dropout rates, homelessness, suicide or substance abuse. The roots are systemic inequities that lead to the challenges expressed in the leaves, such as lack of school funding, limited employment opportunities and discriminatory housing practices.

Attendees were given the ["Pair of ACEs" worksheet](#) to build a tree for their community. When building their trees, participants were encouraged to ask themselves:

- *What does adversity look like in my community?* These are the branches and leaves—the part of the tree that is easily visible.
- *What is driving that adversity?* This is the soil—the underlying conditions that lead to the outcomes.

The "Pair of ACEs" tree is useful to a collaborative process that aims to **create a shared understanding about the root causes of issues in your community**. Dr. Ellis reminded attendees it is important to be mindful of both levels of the tree and work collaboratively with cross-sector partnerships to promote positive mental health outcomes. Cross-sector partnerships require reaching out to anyone who has a stake in making positive community change and can include faith leaders, law enforcement, teachers, neighbors and social service providers. Think about individuals and groups who have been excluded from this sort of process in the past. Everyone should be given the opportunity to work together toward finding solutions—not just the usual parties.

The BCR model is being used in a number of communities across the United States. Check out what's happening in [Cincinnati, Ohio](#), [Dallas, Texas](#), [Missouri-Kansas](#), [Oregon](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#)

[Learn more](#) about the "Pair of ACEs" tree.

Learn More

- [View the slides from this session.](#)
- Check out the ["Building Community Resilience: Coalition Building and Communications Guide" handbook.](#)
- Download the [BCR Partner Build Grow worksheet.](#)
- Read Dr. Ellis' blog post on [Building Community Resilience.](#)

Building Community Collaboratives

Ignite! Getting Your Community Collaborative Fired Up for Change (Dr. Frances Butterfoss)

[Dr. Frances Butterfoss](#) gave attendees step-by-step recommendations on building collaboratives within rural communities:

1. Establish the following key elements:
 - a. Define a common vision and mission among members
 - b. Seek engaged and committed members with high levels of trust and reciprocity
 - c. Utilize frequent communication and training opportunities to connect
 - d. Use just enough structure and processes to allow for some flexibility
 - e. Invite residents of the community to serve in leadership roles
2. Focus on building up the “grassroots” community leaders (people who are “on the ground” and connected in the community but aren’t in formal/conventional positions of power) and unite them with the “grasstips” (people who are in formal/conventional positions of power).
3. Understand the cycle of building collaboratives and start at whatever stage your collaborative is in. Learn more about this process through [tools from Coalitions Work](#).
4. Learn everything you can about the priority population your collaborative is serving.
5. Inclusion is key! **Representation in the collaborative should match the community** you are trying to reach.
6. **Prioritize engagement and retention of collaborative members** by making sure everyone knows what their role is in working toward the same mission and goals.

Case Study | Impact Lufkin

Councilman Robert Shankle shared his experiences with the [Impact Lufkin “Community Driven” revitalization project](#), which served as a great example of the success of capacity building through far-reaching inclusion and cross-sector community collaboration. This project sought to address systemic problems, driven by the voices and input of residents. Impact Lufkin's holistic inclusivity, including children and youth, led to community buy-in. Residents took ownership of the project resulting in plans for a neighborhood center that fulfills the diverse needs identified by the community.

Learn More

- [View slides from this session.](#)
- Check out Dr. Butterfoss' book: [Ignite! Getting Your Community Coalition “Fired Up” for Change](#)
- Read Dr. Butterfoss' blog post on [Recruiting and Engaging Diverse, Committed Collaborative Members](#).

Individuals and Organizations as Changemakers (Oscar Benavides)

Many speakers discussed the importance of bottom-up leadership, where leaders are actively engaging the community, listening to their concerns and working toward common goals. Bottom-up leadership is based on the idea that it takes everyone in a community to create change, and a project will be successful only when the community truly believes in it.

To have bottom-up leadership, we must:

- **Build trust with the community and stakeholders.** Take time to build trust and follow through on promises made.
- **Include everyone.** Reach out to community members who have historically been excluded from the conversation. Create a diverse collaboration that may include teachers, faith leaders, organizations, city council representatives, mental health providers, etc.
- **Create a mission, shared values and goals** based on community member participation and their expressed needs.

[Oscar Benavides](#) emphasized how important our mindset is in helping us become effective and inclusive leaders. We can create positive change in our organizations by [changing from an inward mindset to an outward mindset](#). An inward mindset prioritizes your needs without consideration of the goals and objectives of other people. An outward mindset views your needs and objectives as equal to those of others.

Using his personal experience as an example, Benavides discussed the importance of incorporating community member participation and feedback into the collaborative model to create positive outcomes.

Learn More

- [View slides from this session.](#)
- Benavides recommended the following books: [The Outward Mindset, Leadership and Self-Deception, The Anatomy of Peace.](#)
- Read Benavides' blog post on [How Changing Ourselves Can Change Systems.](#)

Solving Community Conditions with Community Members

Circles of Inclusion: Engaging Historically Excluded Groups (Sheila Savannah)

[Sheila Savannah's](#) session focused on understanding the history of exclusion and the necessity to engage marginalized groups in community-building and decision-making processes. Radical inclusion and creating space for belonging is at the forefront of effective community change. Savannah discussed how norms in society have been shaped over time with some groups included and others excluded. To affect change in our communities, she urged attendees to confront implicit biases and create a sense of belonging with those who have historically been excluded from the conversation. Savannah demonstrated how we can be more inclusive by using the [Pillars of Wellbeing](#) framework—core stabilizing elements needed for people and communities to flourish emotionally.

Exercise | The Subjectivity of Social Groupings

Materials needed: Several decks of cards mixed up (one card per person)

This activity reveals habits of social grouping and builds unity within your collaboration!

1. Give every participant one playing card.
2. Then, simply tell everyone to find their group. Don't provide any other instructions!
3. Once the group/groups have formed, ask participants what they see. How did things end up? What did they experience when trying to find their group? How did it feel?

Participants at the seminar chose who to align themselves with to form groups based on the card number, suit, color, design, etc. Participants formed and re-formed groups on their own multiple times. This activity showed how grouping is a subjective activity and how to move out of exclusionary ways of thinking to create belonging for everyone. In the end, everyone with a card came together as one group, realizing that simply having a card was a way to form a group, versus dividing into sub-groups based on characteristics of the cards.

Savannah recommended the following elements for effective collaboration:

- **Create belonging and connection:** Accessibility is key to engagement. Move the conversation to days/times when people can easily join and participate. Go where people naturally gather.
- **Create safe spaces:** Create a space where people feel comfortable sharing without fear of retaliation; a space where people are offered trust, and where diversity is honored and treated with dignity and respect.
- **Create opportunity for control of destiny:** Create an opportunity for people to feel they are a part of forming something bigger and better and can act as consumers of their own environment.
- **Build hope and aspiration:** Be a positive beacon during tough conversations. Help people see what's possible if everyone in a community is included in conversations that impact their day-to-day lives and circumstances.

Exercise | Expanding Circles of Inclusion

Materials needed: Paper and pen/pencil

1. Invite participants to draw a circle on a piece of paper.
2. Inside this circle, list people, organizations or groups with whom you typically collaborate.
3. Outside of the circle, list organizations or groups with whom you have not collaborated.
4. Think of ways to bring those outside the circle inside.

This exercise is a great way to get into a more collaborative state of mind and identify the people and groups who are not present in the process, and to think outside of their usual circles and networks. Everyone in a community has strengths and assets to bring forth. We need the conviction and the courage to expand our circles and bring everyone to the decision-making table.

Savannah reminded attendees of two important things:

- **Different people build trust at different speeds.** Do the work at the speed of trust.
- **It's okay to stumble, but we should always fail forward.** Allow opportunities for failure when working with people outside of our usual circles. Learn from mistakes and move forward.

Tools for Establishing Trust and Building Engagement

Building trust and a sense of belonging is central to working collaboratively within rural communities. Savannah's advice for establishing trust with groups who have been excluded in the past is to practice cultural humility. How? Prioritize the experiences, needs and perspectives of those historically excluded at the beginning of the conversation and decision-making process.

Cultural humility is a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation, understanding our place within power structures and forming equal partnerships with the goal of eradicating power imbalances in community-building work. [Learn more](#) about cultural humility.

Ways to establish trust and build engagement:

- **Be inclusive and let community members lead.**
 - Overcome and address barriers to participation.
 - Acknowledge if trust has been broken in the past.
 - Recognize how the experiences of participants have differed from your own lived experiences. Honor and respect those differences.
 - Give space for healing to happen.
 - Instead of telling people what you want, ask them what they need.
- **Be deliberate and patient.**
 - Recognize that change takes time. Do it in small doses. Start organically and build on relationships.

- **Don't limit meetings to traditional work hours in traditional office settings.**
 - A participant said the most productive meetings her collaborative held were in the evenings, weekends and during festivals when most community members were off work and could attend. For example, another participant said one of their best conversations took place on Sunday morning in a pea patch in a community garden. They invited people to come out and pick peas while discussing their project.
- **If a local policy is affecting your ability to be successful, change it!**
 - A participant said much of her town's meeting places were closed during the lunch hour when community members were available to meet. Savannah advised they first focus on changing local policy to re-open the library during lunch time.
- **Pick low-hanging fruit!**
 - Start pursuing goals that can be easily accomplished to help build confidence and commitment.

Learn More

- [View slides from this session.](#)
- Watch videos highlighting organizations who have expanded their circles to create change: [Community Farm Alliance](#), [United Women of East Africa](#) and [Push Buffalo](#).
- Download the [Ensuring Engagement of Historically Excluded Groups in Community Collaboration worksheet](#).

Simple, Powerful Methods to Include Everyone (Anna Jackson and Nakia Winfield)

[Nakia Winfield](#) and [Anna Jackson](#) discussed the power of structured dialogue and shared techniques for engaging participants within a collaborative or organization. Using structured dialogue techniques (like the [Liberating Structures](#) framework) can facilitate deeper and more thoughtful conversations, while strengthening relationships and creating space for vulnerability.

Winfield and Jackson asked participants to consider power dynamics and offered advice for planning collaborative meetings:

- **Be intentional** when you create spaces and structures for conversation, and **be mindful of power dynamics**.
- **Think about how much “space you are taking up” as a facilitator** or speaker and steps you can take to give others room to talk and make genuine connections.
- **Explore ways to design an inviting environment for everyone.** Be thoughtful about how you set up a meeting space and how you invite participants to engage in that space. How can you physically set up a room to change how people interact with each other? For example, setting up small circles of chairs allows people to make more connections with others.

Check out the Liberating Structures design principles and [create a storyboard](#) for your next meeting! This can help you create a realistic agenda and identify clear goals so the convening runs smoothly.

Methods for Including Everyone

The following activities are examples of ways to increase engagement and group connection.

Exercise | Impromptu Networking

Materials needed: A watch/clock

This activity facilitates group cohesion and increases engagement in your collaborative by cultivating feelings of connectedness and comfort. It helps people connect more deeply and more quickly than is possible in a large group conversation.

1. Ask participants to partner up with one person they don't know well.
2. Then, pose a "deep dive" question and give both people two minutes to respond to the question (talking only to each other). Deep dive question examples:
 - o What big challenge in the community brings you to this gathering?
 - o What do you hope to get from and give this group or community?
3. After four minutes, invite participants to switch partners (find someone new) and respond to the same question.
4. After another four minutes, participants switch partners (find someone new) a third time.

[Learn more](#) about the activity.

Exercise | Social Network Webbing

Materials needed: None

This activity is a way to visualize connections within a group and help identify opportunities for further collaboration. It's a nice way to end a meeting and acknowledge the people in the room.

1. Invite participants to stand up.
2. Then ask participants to place their hand on the shoulder of someone with whom they work closely. This makes visible the connections that existed before the meeting started.
3. Next, ask participants to place their hand on the shoulder of someone who said something during the meeting that they appreciated. This is a way to express gratitude and show new connections made during the meeting.
4. Finally, ask participants to place their hand on the shoulder of someone who inspired them during the meeting and/or who they would like to follow up with after the meeting. This is a way to show connections that are just beginning or in progress and it's a great way spark future collaboration and engagement.

[Learn more](#) about the activity.

Exercise | 25/10 Crowdsourcing

Materials needed: Pens and paper/sticky notes

This activity reveals a group's most powerful, actionable ideas. It allows participants to anonymously share their thoughts, creating an opportunity for participation from people who aren't comfortable talking in big groups. The anonymity creates less anxiety around "good" or "bad" ideas.

1. Identify a topic. For example: What is one behavior or practice that helps foster truly inclusive spaces for groups?
2. Invite participants to write one idea on their paper/sticky note. (This activity is anonymous—participants do not write their names.)
3. Then have participants exchange their paper with someone else, and then someone else, and then someone else. The pieces of paper should change hands several times to ensure everyone ends up with someone else's idea. It's great to ask people to get up and walk around to do this!
4. Then, have participants score the idea in their hand on a scale of 1 to 5 and write the score on the piece of paper/sticky note.
 - A score of 1 = "I am unlikely to use this idea"
 - A score of 5 = "I will definitely use this idea"
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 four more times, for a total of five times leading to five scores.
6. After the fifth score is written on the pieces of papers, have the fifth scorer add up all the scores on the paper they're holding and add the total to the paper (25 total possible points).
7. Finally, ask the group, "Who has an idea that scored 25 points?" Ask participants to read those ideas to the group. Move on to ideas that scored 24 points, and then 23 points, and so on until you've read the top 10 ideas.

[Learn more](#) about the activity.

Exercise | Celebrity Interview

Materials needed: Two chairs

This activity focuses on two people—a "celebrity" (someone with an expertise or important insights on a topic) and an interviewer (someone who can ask questions of the "celebrity"). Interviews can be more interactive, candid and authentic than a presentation and can help a large group learn from an individual about their experience. [Learn more](#) about the activity.

- First, the interviewer welcomes the "celebrity" and introduces the topic.
- Then, the interviewer asks the "celebrity" about their work and experiences related to the topic.
- Next, participants are invited to create additional questions through a [1-2-4-all](#) conversation. Have participants write down their question on an index card/piece of paper and hand it to the interviewer.
- Finally, the interviewer asks the "celebrity" the audience's questions by reading the cards.

Learn More

- [View slides from this session.](#)
- More information and tools can be found on the [Liberating Structures](#) website.
- Read Jackson and Winfield's blog post on [Creating Conditions for Inclusive Conversations.](#)

Building Advocacy and Policy Capacity

The [Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities \(WRC\) grantees](#) convened the day after the seminar. At this meeting, the foundation's Policy Team shared ways for collaboratives to engage with advocacy and policymaking in their communities.

Collective voices carry a lot of power! Policy advocacy increases community well-being by addressing the root causes of systemic inequalities that create and exacerbate mental health challenges in rural areas. Many seminar speakers talked about the importance of engaging with stakeholders on all levels—this includes local, state and federal representatives. The Policy Team also emphasized the importance of collaborating with service providers, state agency staff, mental health consumers and families to develop solutions. They stressed the importance of including the voices of those impacted by mental health policy in this process and offered the following steps for building advocacy capacity in communities:

- **The first phase** of building advocacy capacity is to **increase awareness of the issues in your community by getting to know your policymakers** and visit their district offices. Practice sharing your concerns and become knowledgeable about the priorities of decision-makers.
- **The second phase is skill-building.** Gather issue-specific data, and communication and messaging skills, and practice the art of compromise.
- **The final stage is planning and implementation.** Determine your policy goals and make a plan. Create a common message and develop advocacy materials with accountability measures.

Learn More

- Download the [Building Advocacy Capacity in Communities info sheet](#).
- Download the [Understanding the Legislative Process info sheet](#).
- Learn more about [the foundation's policy work](#) and view the [Mental Health Guide](#) for help navigating mental health policies and systems in Texas.

Our Focus on Communities

To truly promote mental health in everyday life, we must build resilience while eliminating structural inequities and other factors that affect health and well-being in communities. Learn about the foundation's [strategic focus on communities and collaboration](#) and our [funding strategy](#), and check out the work of our [Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities grantees](#).

For more information visit hogg.utexas.edu. Stay in the loop about our funding opportunities, events, and mental health news and insights—[subscribe to our emails](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter!](#)