

The Community-Law Enforcement Aligning in Response to Substance use (CLEARS) Project

Summary of Process Evaluation Findings

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Study Details

Study Description: A co-design process to improve interactions between law enforcement and people with lived experience of substance use was conducted across four counties in Washington State: Chelan-Douglas Counties, Grant County, Kitsap County, and Whatcom County. These process evaluation results come from a study that sought to 1) better understand participants' perceptions of and experiences in the co-design process and 2) identify strengths and areas for improvement for future co-design processes.

Methods: We conducted and analyzed 31 individual semi-structured interviews with co-design participants across the four regions: Chelan-Douglas County (n=9), Grant County (n = 5), Kitsap County (n = 7), Whatcom County (n=6) and with members of the University of Washington's (UW) internal research team (n=4) between December 2024 and March 2025. Our sample was composed of law enforcement officers (n=10), service providers (n=11), people with lived experience of substance use (n=6)*, and UW internal team members (n=5). All interviews, which ranged from 30–70 minutes, were conducted remotely using the online teleconferencing platform Zoom. The interviews were conducted by the Research with Expert Advisors on Drug Use (READU) team, which is comprised of people with lived and living experience of drug use and individuals with traditional training in research. Each interview was then audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A pre- and post-survey was conducted with all co-design participants at the outset and conclusion of the process. A total of 55 individuals completed the pre-co-design survey, while 39 responded to the post-co-design survey.

Analysis: For the qualitative interviews, we conducted a rapid analysis process (RAP) by creating a RAP template with domains and categories that were identified from the interview guide. We summarized, focused, and organized the data by completing the RAP template for each transcript. Lastly, we created a matrix of the RAP templates, reviewed the data, and generated themes. For the pre-post survey: open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, close-ended questions were described using descriptive statistics, and analyzed with chi-square tests or t-tests where appropriate, along with network visualizations.

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*The breakdown of sample sizes for participant roles may not sum up to the total sample size as some participants held multiple roles and had different identities.

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Pre-Post Survey Questionnaire Findings

A pre-post survey was administered to all co-design participants at the beginning of the process; 55 participants responded to the pre-co-design survey and 39 participants responded to the post-codesign survey. Open-ended results from the survey were grouped using thematic analysis and are summarized in Table 1 and 2 below. Close-ended question results are summarized using descriptive statistics, chi-square or t-tests as appropriate, and network visualizations.

1. Participation by site

This section summarizes participant representation by site for both the pre- and post-surveys. Participants were asked to indicate which site they worked in or were affiliated with. Responses were aggregated by site to ensure anonymity and to assess regional engagement in the policy codesign process.

Table 1 shows the distribution of pre-survey participants across the four sites. Chelan/Douglas had the largest share of respondents (30.9%), followed by Grant (25.5%). Kitsap and Whatcom each accounted for 21.8% of the sample. This relatively balanced distribution suggests broad regional representation. In the post-survey sample, Kitsap had the highest proportion of participants at 30.8% (n=12), followed by Chelan/Douglas at 28.2% (n=11). Grant represented 23.1% of respondents (n=9), while Whatcom had the smallest share at 17.9% (n=7). Compared to the pre-survey, representation shifted slightly, with Kitsap increasing its share and Whatcom showing a decrease.

Table 1: Number of Participants Per Site (Pre and post-survey)

	Site	Pre-Count (n)	Percentage (%)	Post-Count (n)	Percentage (%)
	<i>Grant</i>	14	25.5	9	23.1
	<i>Chelan/Douglas</i>	17	30.9	11	28.2
	<i>Kitsap</i>	12	21.8	12	30.8
	<i>Whatcom</i>	12	21.8	7	17.9

2. Survey Demographics

This section provides a summary of demographic characteristics for participants in the policy codesign process. Data reflect self-reported information and were collected to better understand the diversity of experiences and perspectives represented in the group. The table below includes details on education, professional and lived experience identities, gender, race, ethnicity, and other relevant identities. Percentages are based on a total of 34 respondents who completed demographic questions in the post-survey.

Table 2. Demographic Information for Survey Participants (n=34)

Category	Response Option	n	%
Education Level	Some high school	2	5.9%
	High school degree	4	11.8%
	Some college	14	41.2%
	Bachelor's degree	12	35.3%
	Master's degree	3	8.8%
	PhD or MD	0	0.0%
	Other	2	5.9%
Role / Identity	Law Enforcement	9	26.5%
	Service Provider	19	55.9%
	Person with Living/Lived Experience	21	61.8%
	Person with Loved One with Living/Lived Experience	19	55.9%
	Other	3	8.8%
Gender & Orientation	Man	14	41.2%
	Woman	17	50.0%
	Non-binary	1	2.9%
	Straight	2	5.9%
	Blank/N/A	6	17.6%
Other Identities	LGBT	2	5.9%
	Living with a disability	1	2.9%
	Immigrant	1	2.9%
	Veteran	2	5.9%
Race	Bi-racial	1	2.9%
	Native American	1	2.9%
	Hispanic (Race)	1	2.9%
	Human (self-reported)	3	8.8%
	White	27	79.4%
Ethnicity	N/A or blank	6	17.6%
	Irish	1	2.9%
	Hispanic	1	2.9%
	Ashkenazi	1	2.9%
	Non-Hispanic or N/A	33	97.1%

3. Thematic Analysis of Pre-Survey Responses

In the pre-co-design survey, participants were asked the question: “*Why did you decide to participate in the policy co-design process?*” Results from the thematic analysis are captured in Table 3 below.

Overall, participants in the pre-survey expressed a variety of motivations for joining the policy co-design process. Many participants were driven by a desire to make a difference in their communities, hoping to contribute to meaningful change. This sentiment was echoed by those who felt a strong commitment to community and public service, viewing their participation as part of their duty to their profession or community. Additionally, some participants were motivated by their lived and professional experiences related to substance use or law enforcement, seeking to leverage their firsthand knowledge to effect positive change. There was also a notable interest in collaboration and learning, with participants eager to engage with others, share knowledge, and build relationships. Lastly, a number of participants were either invited or required to attend by their supervisors, indicating institutional support for the initiative.

When responding to being asked, “*What are your hopes for what this process will achieve,*” the hopes and expectations of participants for the co-design process were diverse and ambitious. Many participants wished to see stronger community and agency partnerships, aiming for improved collaboration between stakeholders. There was a strong desire for improved access to resources, with hopes of expanding and making them more accessible to those in need. Participants also expressed a need for tangible policy and systems change, seeking long-term structural improvements. Another key hope was the reduction of barriers and stigma, with participants aiming to break down the divides between law enforcement, service providers, and individuals experiencing substance use disorders. Additionally, some participants hoped to gain a better understanding of different perspectives, particularly those of law enforcement and social services.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Pre-Survey Responses (n=55)

Question	Themes	Description	Example Quotes
Why did you decide to participate in the co-design process?	Desire to Make a Difference	Many participants wanted to contribute to meaningful change in their communities.	<i>"I highly believe in change. I'm always looking for what I can do to be a part of the solution."</i>
	Commitment to Community & Public Service	Many saw their participation as part of their duty to their profession or community.	<i>"I care about this community."</i>
	Lived & Professional Experience	Some were motivated by personal or professional experiences related to substance use or law enforcement.	<i>"I've firsthand dealt with complications in both recovery and active use. I want to help make the change."</i>
	Interest in Collaboration & Learning	Participants were eager to engage with others, share knowledge, and build relationships.	<i>"Curious—hoping it would be different from another 'partnering'"</i>

			<i>attempt I've been involved with."</i>
	Invited or Required to Attend	A number of participants were either invited or asked to attend by their supervisors.	<i>"I was asked to participate by my director."</i>
<i>What are your hopes for what this process will achieve?</i>	Stronger Community & Agency Partnerships	Many wanted to see improved collaboration between stakeholders.	<i>"Systemic change and stronger relationships between silos."</i>
	Improved Access to Resources	Hopes included expanding resources and making them more accessible.	<i>"Bringing resources and hope to Grant County."</i>
	Policy & Systems Change	Many wanted tangible, long-term policy or structural changes.	<i>"To develop and recommend responsible, effective, and financially sustainable collective solutions."</i>
	Reduction of Barriers & Stigma	Participants hoped to break down barriers between law enforcement, service providers, and people experiencing SUD.	<i>"Breaking down barriers between community and police, empowering police to be more effective."</i>
	Increased Understanding of Different Perspectives	Some wanted to gain insight into law enforcement and social services.	<i>"I hope it will lead to making a positive difference in Kitsap."</i>

4. Thematic Analysis of Post-Survey Responses

As part of the post-session feedback, participants were asked whether they would participate in the policy codesign process again. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing strong enthusiasm, appreciation for the experience, and a sense of connection to the community and the work. The word cloud in **Figure 1** highlights the most common words and phrases from participant responses.

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Participant Responses to “Would you participate again?”



The post-survey responses indicated a strong willingness among many participants to engage in the co-design project again. Participants appreciated the positive impact, collaboration, and learning experiences facilitated by the process. They saw the co-design approach as valuable for addressing systemic issues and fostering community change. The value of hearing diverse perspectives and learning from others was highlighted as a

significant benefit. However, some participants faced challenges such as time constraints, unclear goals, and competing priorities, which affected their ability to fully engage. A small number of respondents were skeptical about the impact of the process, questioning whether it led to real change and noting the time-consuming nature of the project.

Participants were asked whether the co-design process met their initial hopes and goals. Responses suggest a wide range of reflections, with many affirming their expectations were met or even exceeded, while others highlighted specific areas for continued growth and improvement. Many felt that the project strengthened collaboration and relationships, exceeding their expectations in terms of community engagement. Respondents gained greater understanding and awareness of different perspectives, particularly those of law enforcement which was a stated goal for some participants. However, some participants felt there was a lack of clarity in defining problems and setting goals, which hindered the effectiveness of the process. While conversations were valuable, some felt the project lacked actionable solutions and did not emphasize things that would actually lead to change, such as meaningful law enforcement engagement with individuals using substances. Despite these challenges, some participants had open-minded and flexible expectations, finding the process meaningful even without specific goals. The word cloud in Figure 2 highlights the most common words used in these responses.

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Participant Responses to “Would you participate again?”



Finally, as part of the post-session feedback, participants were asked ***“What, if anything, would you do to improve or change the LE Co-Design process?”***

Responses reflected a mix of affirmation and constructive feedback. Several participants stated that they would not change anything, while others suggested specific areas for improvement, including time, structure, clarity, and engagement.

Participants recommended increasing law enforcement participation to ensure more balanced representation and drive outcomes that are more law enforcement-driven (i.e., solutions that lead to behavior change for law enforcement). There was a call for more structured and clearer goals, with participants wanting stronger direction and goal-setting from the outset. Modifying meeting structures and logistics, such as holding meetings at more convenient times and planning them further in advance, was also suggested to accommodate participants' schedules better. Stronger buy-in and accountability were recommended, with ideas such as structured homework assignments and engagement between sessions to maintain momentum. Some participants recommended job shadowing or other immersive experiences to build mutual understanding between law enforcement and service providers. Ensuring balanced representation of key voices and focusing on tangible, measurable outcomes over extensive discussions were also highlighted as areas for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the co-design process. Still, many participants expressed satisfaction with the process, saying they wouldn't change anything or found it to be well-structured and collaborative as is.

The themes reflected in participant answers are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Post-Survey Responses (n=39)

Question	Themes	Description	Example Quotes
Would you participate in the Co-Design project again? Why or why not?	Strong Willingness to Participate Again	Many respondents expressed enthusiasm about rejoining due to positive impact, collaboration, and learning.	<i>"Absolutely! The experience strengthened relationships between system partners and facilitated open and honest dialogue."</i>
	Commitment to Community Change	Participants saw co-design as a necessary approach to address systemic issues.	<i>"Yes! Being part of the solution is what fills my heart up!"</i>
	Value of Collaboration & Learning	Participants valued hearing diverse perspectives and learning from others.	<i>"Yes, I believe being together and listening to different experiences only enhances and brings forward possible solutions."</i>
	Challenges & Barriers to Participation	Some struggled with time constraints, unclear goals, or competing priorities.	<i>"Maybe. It felt challenging to focus in on what we were trying to accomplish and how to get there."</i>
	Skepticism About Impact	A small number were unsure if the process led to real change,	<i>"No. Very time-consuming."</i>

		and were reluctant to participate again given the time and resource investment.	
Did the process meet your initial hopes and goals?	Met or Exceeded Expectations	Many felt the project strengthened collaboration and relationships.	<i>"Yes, knowing and combining resources in the community makes the process more effective."</i>
	Greater Understanding & Awareness	Respondents gained deeper insight into different perspectives.	<i>"I did get to know and understand a bit more of the LE perspective. So, yes."</i>
	Challenges with Focus & Direction	Some felt there was a lack of clarity in defining problems and setting goals.	<i>"Very different than expected. Limited direction can be challenging for such a diverse group."</i>
	Mixed Feelings on Achieving Goals	While conversations were valuable, some felt the project lacked actionable solutions.	<i>"I thought the process would lead towards helping us figure out a way for law enforcement to better engage with individuals using substances. That wasn't emphasized."</i>
	Open-Minded & Flexible Expectations	Some had no specific expectations but found the process meaningful.	<i>"Had no hopes/goals going in—open mind about the experience."</i>
What would you improve about the Co-Design process?	Increase Law Enforcement Participation	Some felt that law enforcement engagement was too low.	<i>"We had minimal law enforcement participation. I don't know how to change that, but with a heavier participation rate, the outcome would be more LE-driven."</i>
	More Structured & Clearer Goals	Participants wanted clearer direction and stronger goal-setting.	<i>"More clarity in early meetings about our purpose and shared project."</i>
	Modify Meeting Structure & Logistics	Many suggested holding meetings at more convenient times and planning them further in advance.	<i>"Holding the meetings in the afternoons/weekends since workload/unexpected work situations at times conflicted with meetings."</i>
	Stronger Buy-In & Accountability	Suggested more structured homework	<i>"Selecting several individuals within the group to connect</i>

	assignments and engagement between sessions.	<i>outside of the meetings in order to meet goals/timelines and complete 'homework'.</i> "
Ensure Balanced Representation	Some felt the group lacked full representation of key voices.	<i>"Modify the group, remove anti-law enforcement persons or entities. LE will know which groups would not fit."</i>
Focus on Tangible, Measurable Outcomes	Suggested greater emphasis on actionable solutions over extensive discussions.	<i>"I would have more tangible, measurable, direct effect goals taken on, with more focus on projects and less focus on collecting data and perspectives."</i>

5. Comparison of Interaction Types

Our pre-post survey examined how participants interacted with other members of their site's codesign team before and after the co-design process. Participants were asked to select all applicable types of prior interaction, including social engagement, shared work on similar or different topics, and accessing resources. Data were aggregated by site to protect participant anonymity and to assess how connections evolved over time.

Interaction types varied across sites, but all four regions showed increases in engagement following the first policy codesign session. Below is a summary of key changes by site (see Table 5 for detailed counts and rates):

- **Grant:** As we would expect, the proportion of participants reporting no prior interaction decreased (from 9.43% to 7.50%), and social and collaborative connections increased. Notably, there was a rise in participants who reported discussing different topics than CLEARs (from 5.71% to 9.67%) and similar topics to CLEARs (from 4.71% to 9.67%). This suggests a broadening of professional engagement within the team.
- **Chelan/Douglas:** This site experienced the largest overall growth in interaction. Discussions about *similar topics to CLEARs* increased from 4.00% to 10.33%, and those about *different topics* rose from 6.25% to 10.22%. There was also an increase in *resource access* and *social interactions*, indicating a substantial expansion in both formal and informal connections.
- **Kitsap:** Kitsap saw notable increases in interactions related to *accessing resources* (from 3.60% to 8.00%) and discussions about *different topics* (from 2.20% to 6.80%). Though *social* and *similar-topic* interactions remained relatively modest, the drop in *no interaction* (from 6.40% to 3.80%) points to an overall improvement in team connectivity.
- **Whatcom:** While Whatcom started with relatively lower pre-session interactions, it made gains in *discussions on similar topics* (from 3.83% to 5.50%). The proportion

reporting *no prior interaction* dropped from 5.00% to 7.50%, indicating perhaps that new participants joined the co-design process along the way and that other participants did not have interaction with them outside of the sessions.

Overall, the data suggest that the policy codesign session facilitated stronger interpersonal and professional connections across all sites—particularly through shared work and topic-related discussions, which are central to collaborative learning and systems alignment.

Table 5: Interaction types by Site, Pre- and Post-Survey

Site	Interaction Type	Pre (n)	Pre (Rate)	Post (n)	Post (Rate)
Grant	Have not interacted	66	9.43%	45	7.50%
Grant	Socially	26	3.71%	24	4.00%
Grant	Discussion or shared work about similar topics to CLEARs	33	4.71%	58	9.67%
Grant	Discussion or shared work about different topics than CLEARs	40	5.71%	58	9.67%
Grant	Accessing resources	33	4.71%	31	5.17%
Chelan/Douglas	Have not interacted	49	6.12%	39	6.56%
Chelan/Douglas	Socially	15	1.88%	24	3.33%
Chelan/Douglas	Discussion or shared work about similar topics to CLEARs	32	4.00%	93	10.33%
Chelan/Douglas	Discussion or shared work about different topics than CLEARs	50	6.25%	92	10.22%
Chelan/Douglas	Accessing resources	28	3.50%	72	8.00%
Kitsap	Have not interacted	32	6.40%	38	7.60%
Kitsap	Socially	21	4.20%	5	1.00%
Kitsap	Discussion or shared work about similar topics to CLEARs	8	1.60%	21	4.20%
Kitsap	Discussion or shared work about different topics than CLEARs	11	2.20%	34	6.80%
Kitsap	Accessing resources	18	3.60%	40	8.00%
Whatcom	Have not interacted	30	5.00%	45	7.50%
Whatcom	Socially	4	0.67%	5	0.83%
Whatcom	Discussion or shared work about similar topics to CLEARs	23	3.83%	33	5.50%
Whatcom	Discussion or shared work about different topics than CLEARs	24	4.00%	23	3.83%
Whatcom	Accessing resources	13	2.17%	19	3.17%

6. Comparison of Approachability

This section examines changes in how approachable team members were perceived to be before and after the first codesign session. Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 1

(least approachable) to 10 (most approachable), how easily they felt they could approach each person from the policy codesign team to discuss topics that might come up in the process. Data were aggregated by site to protect participant anonymity and to assess shifts in interpersonal dynamics across regions.

Across all four sites, changes in perceived approachability were statistically significant, though the direction of change varied (see Table 6).

- **Grant** saw a modest but meaningful increase in mean approachability from 7.77 to 8.27 ($t = 7.25, p < 0.001$).
- **Chelan/Douglas** experienced the largest increase, with mean scores rising from 7.94 to 8.76 ($t = 11.73, p < 0.001$), suggesting a strong improvement in perceived approachability of team members.
- **Kitsap** began with the highest pre-survey rating (8.72), but saw a slight decline to 8.35 post-survey. The change was statistically significant ($t = 10.37, p < 0.001$).
- **Whatcom** also experienced a small decline in approachability scores (from 7.39 to 7.33), with a statistically significant difference ($t = 4.50, p < 0.001$).

These findings suggest that the codesign process contributed to improved perceptions of approachability in some regions but slightly less perceived approachability in other regions, possibly due to new participants joining the process who were not present when the pre survey was administered.

Table 6: Mean Approachability Scores by Site, Pre- and Post-Survey*

Site	Pre Mean	Pre (count)	Post Mean	Post (count)	t-value	p-value
Grant	7.77	112	8.27	129	7.25	< 0.001
Chelan/Douglas	7.94	109	8.76	182	11.73	< 0.001
Kitsap	8.72	39	8.35	101	10.37	< 0.001
Whatcom	7.39	49	7.33	88	4.50	< 0.001

* Note: The counts shown in Table 6 are larger than the total number of survey participants ($n=55$ pre and $n=39$ post) because each person was asked to rate the approachability of all other participants at their site, and the total aggregate count data were used.

7. Comparison of Trust Levels

This section explores changes in participant trust within the policy codesign team at each site. Participants were asked, *“Before the first policy codesign session, whom on the policy codesign team did you deeply trust to hear and respect your perspective? (Check all that apply).”* Responses were aggregated by site to protect anonymity and to assess shifts in trust from pre- to post-survey.

As shown in **Table 7**, levels of reported trust increased across all four sites, although only three showed statistically significant changes.

- **Grant** showed a small increase in the number of team members trusted (from 41 to 52), but this change was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.30$, $p = 0.254$).
- **Chelan/Douglas** experienced a large and statistically significant increase in trust (from 60 to 102; $\chi^2 = 10.89$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting the codesign process meaningfully strengthened interpersonal trust.
- **Kitsap** saw the largest increase, with trust counts nearly tripling from 24 to 65 ($\chi^2 = 18.89$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a strong shift in perceived respect and reliability among team members.
- **Whatcom** also showed a significant increase in trust (from 21 to 43; $\chi^2 = 7.56$, $p = 0.006$), reinforcing the positive impact of collaborative engagement in this region.

These findings highlight how the codesign process may enhance trust among participants, particularly in regions where pre-survey trust levels were lower.

Table 7: Number of Team Members Trusted by Site, Pre- and Post-Survey*

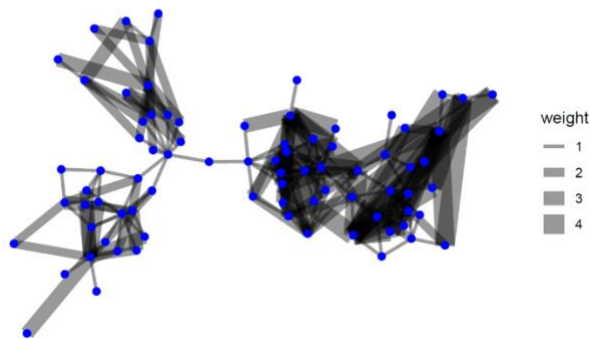
Site	Pre CLEARs Total Trusted (count)	Post CLEARs Total Trusted (count)	Chi-Square	p-value
Grant	41	52	1.30	0.254
Chelan/Douglas	60	102	10.89	< 0.001
Kitsap	24	65	18.89	< 0.001
Whatcom	21	43	7.56	0.006

* Note: The counts shown in Table 7 are higher than the total number of survey participants (n=55 pre and n=39 post) because each person was asked to state the trustworthiness of all other participants at their site, and the total aggregate count data were used.

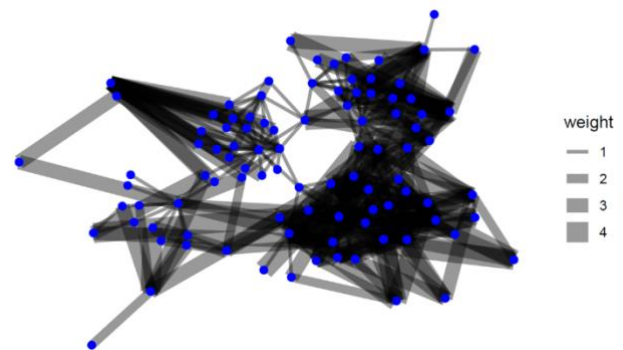
8. Social Network Visualization

Using the network data collected in the pre-codesign survey, we created visualizations of the strength of the connections in each of the four sites participating in the co-design process. A full social network analysis was not possible due to response rates and changes in the participants over time, however, we offer Figure 3 as a visual depiction of the networks before and after the co-design process.

Social Network Visualization (Pre)



Social Network Visualization (Post)



Interview Findings

9. Early Process

9.1. Involvement and Participation in the Process

In our interviews with co-design participants, we observed several ways participants became involved in the project. Participants were invited by a member of the internal University of Washington team, invited by a community contact such as a community-based organization, invited by a colleague or delegated to represent their organization. A majority of participants expressed excitement at having been asked to join and described desires to share their own lived experiences and personal perspectives with others—with the overall goal of collaborating with various partners to generate a solution that met the needs of communities.

The internal University of Washington team was led by a clinical psychologist and researcher, who helped invite other collaborators, including two facilitation consultants, a law enforcement consultant, a drug use health consultant, a project coordinator, and a research team of community members. Each member of the team was specifically invited for this project with the intention of including different voices and experiences on the internal team.

“I was super excited to— after getting in recovery, I’ve had interactions with them [law enforcement] through the work I do and whatnot. But to be able to actually sit in a room and use all of our experience, it was super exciting to be part of that” [ID17]

“I thought it was a great thing because working at [redacted], I had a lot of input from the community before I started about just our community and the disconnect with law enforcement and not necessarily wanting to interact just in policing in general [...] but also just knowing what was happening in the city and in the county with a lot of current drug use and people you know that have lived experiences and all that. And also just many other things with the laws in

Washington, which are a little different than from where I came from, and then also some of the unhoused and the encampment and all of that and how they cross and where that was going.”
[ID6]

9.2. Hopes and Expectations for the Process

Interviewees had a varied range of hopes and expectations for the co-design process. Most participants entered the process with a basic understanding of what the process would entail, and others had specific hopes in mind in engaging in the process.

Participant hopes included increasing connection between individuals with lived experience, turning the tide on decades-long community problems revolving drug use, and improving law enforcement interactions with people experiencing addiction, homelessness, and mental health crises. First, participants expressed hope that these co-design meetings would improve relationships among law enforcement, service providers, and people with lived experience of drug use in their community by humanizing each other's experiences. One participant expressed that having a facilitator external to the community might help bring new enthusiasm to an existing community problem and bring together the community to accomplish a shared goal. One law enforcement officer noted that they wanted to leverage this opportunity to foster more empathetic practices for effective and compassionate policing. Lastly, participants carried wishes to enact change in their communities and address the needs of individuals experiencing substance use-related problems.

Most participants expressed that their expectations were met because the process of having law enforcement officers, service providers, and people with lived experience of drug use all come together at the same table fostered greater mutual understanding of each other's points of view and formed trusting relationships. A few participants noted that their hopes of developing a community-led initiative did not fully materialize in part due to a lack of community leadership, clear decision-making, and challenges with accepting the presence of law enforcement in co-design sessions. Participants appreciated the structural support provided from the University of Washington team to facilitate the co-design process.

The internal team generally shared similar sentiments to participants. The internal team carried a level of excitement and high expectations for what the process could achieve, as well as a shared investment into the communities at each site. Although all wanted the process to be beneficial for all participants, they also wished for larger, sustainable solutions compared to the first iteration of the co-design process in 2023. Although they were excited to see the solutions that came out of each community, they did not have specific expectations for outcomes; rather, they wanted solutions to be collaborative and site driven. As facilitators, they hoped to create

conditions for participants to collaborate and have open-minded approaches to creating the co-designed solutions.

“What I was really hoping is more compassion from the law enforcement side. I realize they have a job to do, and dealing with the same type of people over and over again can be very draining, right? And then remembering, really humanizing the people that are addicted or suffering from mental health, and knowing if you show a little compassion, things can go a lot calmer. And I think that understanding happened, but that's kind of what I was hoping for” [ID10]

“My hopes were to-- even if it's just one [person who uses drugs], to get clean and to grow or to just want to change, to have that desire inside of them to want to make a difference within themselves and in the community.” [ID11]

“The CLEARS Project presented kind of a space for folks to be really honest, even when they were expressing an opinion that was in staunch opposition to where our organization stands. But we were really able to sit in that space and hear, “Okay, here's all the things that they're seeing, and here's all the reasons that they're feeling that way. And are there any things that we can do internally to help solve some of the problems that they're identifying?” Because the things that they were identifying weren't invalid. And so that was our hope.” [ID19]

9.3. Unexpected Experiences and Outcomes

Overall, participants were surprised at the pace at which individuals from vastly different backgrounds worked together to connect professionally and personally. Many were encouraged that prejudices were acknowledged and set aside, which allowed for increased involvement in the co-design process. Some participants felt that the external facilitation and management helped make it possible, lightening some of the burden from service providers or other health workers who usually play the role of mediator between law enforcement and people with lived experience. Other participants expressed surprise at the lack of judgement and direct instructiveness of law enforcement.

“I think it surprised me to see how quickly that people came outside of their silos, and they connected not just in a business way, but on a personal way as well. That individuals were able to set aside previous histories, interactions from weeks ago, days ago, years, decades ago, and to bring that in with an attitude where they set aside a bias. They acknowledged a bias, or they could take that history and not taint it or color the present moment with that experience, which I think was really important.” [ID4]

Participants expressed that there were shifting relationships between law enforcement and people with lived experience. A few of the participants stated that law enforcement officers seemed to humanize the experiences of people with substance use disorder, and this realization led to more equal engagement. For others, unexpected conflicts arose in some counties, where past interactions between law enforcement and people with lived experience led to increased tension. Political challenges also created difficulties with implementing certain aspects of solutions.

Important to note, two of the facilitators on the internal team either engaged in the co-design process as facilitators or participants themselves. Despite this, the internal team was surprised by the wide spectrum of viewpoints brought, and how people eventually came together to make significant contributions. Similarly, participants found that the cross-organizational participating and commitment from various entities encouraged a diversity of important perspectives. However, the internal team were not expecting some problems to occur from the very beginning between service providers and law enforcement.

"Yeah. I was surprised at the diversity of folks that UW was able to pull to the table. So I don't know where you sourced all of your information from to get us to all come together, but there were people there that I thought, "Gosh, I would have never expected that person to be in the room." And I can't remember now who the specific folks were in law enforcement that showed up, but it was like they were at the opposite ends of the spectrum." [ID19]

9.4. Positive Experiences

Co-design participants highlighted several positive aspects of their experience. Many participants valued that everyone had something meaningful to contribute and found that the activities encouraged self-reflection. One key takeaway included the development of meaningful connections and relationships, as participants found the process to include opportunities for one-on-one interactions that fostered a deeper understanding of others' backgrounds and life experiences. For example, some law enforcement participants expressed that these interactions helped shift their perspectives, realizing the similarities between themselves and people with lived experience. The smaller breakout discussions also contributed to this, allowing for more in-depth conversations while maintaining a diversity of voices. Participants appreciated that everyone had the opportunity to share their insights in a respectful and open environment.

The internal team was particularly encouraged by the high level of investment in the community and the shared commitment to achieving meaningful change. They found it valuable to work as a team, plan together, and move through the process with clear structure and purpose. While

challenges arose, team members saw the ability to address and resolve conflict as a positive experience.

"Being in a working group, which you know is a long-term working group, was very unique. And it's the first time I've had any kind of personal connection with these people by actually taking the time to sit down in a realistic setting...But those are the personal connections that made this very, very unique. And somehow, I'd like to, on my end, is how do I incorporate the learning experience from the personalization, from the people we're dealing with to my deputies outside of the CLEAR project, right?" [ID5]

"And after our meetings, the law enforcement people and the living experience people would spend a half hour or an hour after the meetings talking with one another just about everyday things as well as the project. And I just thought that that was a really shining example of how productive the codesign can be and how great it was at opening up communication and creating channels of communication that weren't present before." [ID5 – Internal]

"Because we were able to have conversations and be heard on both sides. I'm a person of long-term recovery, and I remember even when I would stop, I'd let them arrest me, still being roughly treated or disregarded when I wasn't really doing anything wrong, and how that puts the fight and flight in us. And I think that they kind of understood that. They got to hear us speak on how we felt, and they got to see people, not me specifically, but others that they had dealt with on the other side and were no longer that person. So regardless of where we're at in life, we're human, right?" [ID10]

Finally, participants with lived experience of drug use found it especially positive to be provided with the flexibility and accommodation of individual needs, such as companion animals.

I heard on many occasions participants saying, "I can't believe I'm sitting next to a police officer. I can't believe I'm sitting next to the head of the jail." I think the ability to choose people who are very important to each other's lives but would have an opportunity to have prolonged and friendly conversations was just terrific. And again, I kept hearing people express, like, "I can't believe I'm doing this," which really signals for me that it was a success in doing what it meant to do. [ID18]

9.5. Negative Experiences

Participants expressed challenges related to scheduling and time commitments, which often made it difficult to engage fully in the co-design process. Balancing participation with other commitments was a common struggle, with some feeling overextended and unable to contribute as much as they had hoped. This had consequences for the cohesiveness of the process, as participants noted that occasional important players, such as law enforcement and service

providers, missed meetings and left gaps in the group dynamic. Additionally, most participants wished that there would be more time to build relationships, as stronger initial connections could have fostered smoother collaboration over the course of the process. For example, participants found that there were limited connections between law enforcement and people with lived experience outside of the meetings. Other participants felt that more structure in the co-design process may allow for more specific action items and concrete next steps.

The internal team echoed concerns about scheduling difficulties and participant turnover. They also reflected on the challenges of ensuring that all voices—particularly those with lived experience—were fully integrated into the co-design process. Some felt that discussions strayed too far from immediate, impactful solutions, particularly in addressing pressing issues like the fentanyl crisis. In one county, ongoing conflict contributed to significant burnout, as tensions carried over from one session to the next.

Specific to site solutions, some participants noted that there was a mismatch between the expectations of solutions compared to the actual solutions being implemented. Contributing to this mismatch were perceptions of an abrupt ending to the facilitation process, and having little information around whether the co-design process yielded meaningful results for the various sites.

“There wasn't a lot of commitment from everyone. In the beginning, we had a lot of repeat people, but then in the end, when it came closer to implementing what we had decided as a team to do, I felt like it was the same three or four people in the end, so. I get everyone's busyness, but I felt like signing up for something, then there has to be some commitment to getting there or it just falls apart.” [ID24]

“And that's what was seen in this same group where they did a good job trying to get us to bring it out, but it wasn't happening. And there might have needed to be a little bit more like, “Okay. Do this. Try this. Let's see if it works.” And if it doesn't, then what needs to change, or do we like it or not? And there was no, “Do this.” [ID6]

10. Facilitation

10.1. Strengths of Facilitation and Engagement

Participants highlighted several strengths of facilitation and engagement, including the formatting of the meetings and schedule of topics. Participants enjoyed attending in-person meetings, which allowed for more meaningful engagement with community partners. Participants also found the icebreakers useful, as they helped humanize everyone and level power dynamics, making participants feel more comfortable and authentic in discussions. Overall, participants expressed that they felt empowered to move along the co-design process at

their own pace without overstepping local leadership and appreciated activities that humanized different groups of people.

Participants overwhelmingly found that the facilitation team was knowledgeable, adaptable, and skilled in bridging divides, with several participants noting that facilitators played to their strengths to foster engagement. Generally, the facilitation style was described as open and encouraging of personal check-ins, which allowed for vulnerability and honest expression. Participants appreciated that meeting locations were comfortable, discussions were well-moderated, and there was clarity in communication. Several participants highlighted how facilitators created a positive atmosphere by incorporating breaks, providing meals, and maintaining a welcoming environment. They also valued how the facilitation team kept conversations on track without being overly rigid, allowing for flexibility when new ideas emerged. Regarding the schedule of topics, participants found that structured schedules helped accommodate individuals who could not attend every session, as they could still track the topics covered.

The internal team found that facilitation was an opportunity to strike a good balance between structured conversation and open-ended input, ensuring that the group stayed focused on the agenda while still allowing for creativity and exploration. The internal team appreciated the flexibility built into the agenda, enabling facilitators to adapt to changing dynamics and group needs. They also felt that the team's ability to manage difficult topics and mixed group dynamics was essential to maintaining a positive, productive atmosphere.

"Facilitation was really good. That was one of the strong points, especially establishing understanding and boundaries at the very beginning. They just like, "Hey, this is a safe place for us all to be, to share our ideas, to share our viewpoints on different topics." [ID21]

"Something that I liked that I thought was great is that the meetings were held in person. So much of everything is done virtually at this time that it's been nice to have an opportunity to go and meet in person with community partners. And I would say that's what I enjoyed, is that we got an opportunity to get together in person and really talk about stuff that's really important to us all." [ID1]

10.2. Areas for Improvement for Facilitation and Engagement

Participants shared several suggestions for improvement in the facilitation and engagement process. Many felt that the time spent developing relationships could be longer to allow for deeper connections to form before jumping into work. There was also a desire for more structure in meetings earlier in the process to keep the process more focused and on track. For example, some participants indicated that having more direct guidance to narrow the focus of discussions would have helped, especially in groups that are new to the process and may not have the cohesiveness to co-create solutions yet.

Several participants pointed out that the facilitation avoided addressing controversial or sensitive topics, like negative perceptions towards law enforcement, which they felt needed to be addressed to move forward. Some participants also suggested that the team could have been more proactive in reaching out to selected individuals for specific tasks rather than asking participants to go out and find people to engage with.

The internal team echoed many of the concerns raised by participants. They noted the importance of being flexible to the needs of each county and customizing the process accordingly. Additionally, there was a desire to build the facilitation process from the ground up in future projects to better align with the unique dynamics of each group. The internal team also reflected on the power dynamics in the group, particularly the influence of law enforcement, and the impact of physical space on communication, suggesting that environments that feel more open and conducive to dialogue would be beneficial moving forward.

“You could feel it in the room that [tension between law enforcement and people with lived experience] needed to be addressed because it would come up, and then it would be stopped like, ‘Well, that’s not what we’re here to talk about.’ And I’m like, ‘But we need to have-- it’s not going to go any farther if we don’t have” [ID6].

10.3. Suggestions for Future Facilitators

Participants offered a range of suggestions for the types of facilitators they believe would be beneficial to have in future co-design processes. Some emphasized the importance of having facilitators with both law enforcement experience and lived experience with drug use to help bridge the gap between the police and communities affected by substance use. Other suggestions included peer navigators, recovery coaches, and individuals with lived experience who may make the process more tangible and foster deeper connections to the issues addressed through the co-design process.

Participants also emphasized the need for facilitators to have a strong understanding of the specific community’s history, culture, and dynamics before engaging in the process. This would allow facilitators to better navigate the intricacies of the local context and ensure that all voices are heard effectively. Key community players, such as EMS, fire personnel, and medical staff, were also seen as important contributors to the facilitation process, while elected officials like prosecutors were deemed unnecessary for productive collaboration.

Regarding facilitation skills, many participants felt that facilitators should possess a balance of structure and flexibility. Participants felt that facilitators should know when to step in to guide the conversation and when to step back, allowing for natural group dynamics to unfold. Several participants also suggested that community members who have earned the trust of the group should be trained as facilitators by the end of the process. This approach would help ensure

that the community takes ownership of the process and that facilitation continues in a sustainable way.

From the internal team's perspective, they supported the idea of bringing in neutral facilitators, ideally from local institutions familiar with both law enforcement and the addiction recovery landscape. They highlighted the importance of community involvement in the facilitation process, suggesting that facilitators should be well integrated into local systems and possess deep knowledge of the community's needs and challenges.

"Well, so when somebody is facilitating something like that and wanting the group to be a part of, I always think that they should, at some point, have them be a part of facilitating what's going on. And I guess she kind of did that because in the end, we should be-- by the end of something like that, we should be the facilitators, right? That's how I believe." [ID10]

"I think there is benefit to having a neutral role. It's like we don't know too much about you guys and we're just here to help and don't have any kind of like... Okay, I kind of want this section to go this way, agenda. So even if we aren't able to be there, trying to find a neutral facilitator would be a plus, whatever that might be. But I think there could be benefit in if you aren't able to take a neutral role, maybe using co-facilitators, so it is like a mixed role, so it's not one perspective kind of leading or facilitating, and possibly swapping around." [ID4 – Internal]

11. Group Dynamics

11.1. Comfort Level

Most participants felt comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences during the co-design process, especially in smaller, close-knit communities where relationships were already established. Many participants reported feeling confident in their ability to express their thoughts, with some noting that they were mindful of the power dynamics in the room, particularly in the presence of law enforcement. Participants appreciated the facilitators' efforts to create a space where everyone's voice could be heard. However, a few participants noted that facilitators could be more aware of potential stigma, particularly related topics such as medication-assisted treatment, and work to prevent judgmental attitudes from emerging during discussions. While most participants felt their opinions were valued, some still struggled with moments of discomfort, particularly in joint activities where their personal goals or views did not always align with the larger group. Despite these challenges, many participants felt that their voices mattered, and that the group created a space where diverse perspectives were welcomed and respected.

"So in the beginning, I'm a little bit of a shy person at first. And in the beginning, I shared them, but I still have that mentality of, "You don't want to hear what I have to say." But within a couple

of weeks, I didn't feel that way anymore, so. But I'm like that in anything I go to, so it wouldn't have really mattered. But I didn't feel like I didn't belong, or my voice didn't matter with probably the second time I was there. So if you can get through me and make me feel comfortable, that's a big step. [ID10]

"Actually, you guys all really made me feel very welcomed and embraced. And it was a really good feeling. I don't know how-- I felt like I was at home." [ID11]

11.2. Balance of Power

Most participants felt there was a good balance of power within the co-design sessions. They appreciated the general notion that everyone was seen as equally important in the process. The diversity of participants was seen as a strength, with individuals from various backgrounds working together towards a shared goal. The group dynamics were generally positive, with participants respecting each other's contributions. However, some participants acknowledged the natural cultural tendency to defer to law enforcement, which created an underlying power differential that could not be fully removed. The facilitators made efforts to address this imbalance, such as having a discussion at the start about the power dynamics between law enforcement, people with lived experience, and service providers, which helped to create more awareness and make the environment more inclusive.

Despite these efforts, law enforcement was still perceived to have more power in the room, which some participants found challenging. One solution suggested to mitigate this imbalance was to appoint both a law enforcement representative and a service provider or person with lived experience as co-chairs to better balance the influence in the group and ensure equity in the process. Participants noted that the one-on-one interactions early in the sessions, where individuals could learn about each other, helped to level the playing field and reinforce the idea that all voices were important. Additionally, some participants felt that more representation from certain groups, such as medical personnel or the "average" citizen could help bring additional, important perspectives.

The internal team also observed that, while power dynamics were generally well managed, some challenges still existed. For example, in one particular site the internal team noticed that law enforcement voices were sometimes quieter due to political concerns. Similarly, they noted that people with lived experience often hesitated to speak up, as they were not accustomed to such settings. These dynamics showed the complexity of power within the group and the importance of continued efforts to foster an environment of equal participation.

"Because it would be much more empowering for people, the living and lived experienced people to be in a session where power leveling was addressed with the law enforcement and the service providers right there ahead of time so that when they come into that first session, they don't feel stymied or handicapped in terms of their ability to voice those thoughts." [ID5]

"I think so much of what happens in a meeting, as we've already said, is about pre-planning. Like when you observe that somebody is, maybe with body language or what they say, not really being a productive part of the group, reaching out between meetings. Why? What are we doing wrong? What could we do better? If you're not the right person to be here to represent Agency X, who should be here? Yeah. So I think being way more proactive between meetings would have made for more effective meetings." [ID18]

"So that is one thing I think was really great. I didn't feel at any time that there was somebody higher up than me or that they presented them that way, right? Or vice versa, I've seen really big personalities on the lived experience end where they can be-- it's hard to explain, but they will look down on law enforcement and have their own opinions. And I didn't feel that in the room. I feel everybody really balanced each other out. No, it was good." [ID10]

11.3. Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Most participants reported minimal conflict during the co-design process, with the overall atmosphere being respectful and constructive. Some participants noted that despite differences in opinions, the group was able to discuss and navigate these tensions without major issues. In one particular site, participants mentioned that there were continued disagreements between law enforcement and people with lived experience/service providers. In particular, tensions arose with participants who were vocally anti-law enforcement, but participants felt that discussions on this issue were not fully explored and did not result in any deeper resolution could take place. Other common sources of conflict included tensions around 1) law enforcement uniforms and 2) prior interactions between law enforcement and people who use drugs.

The internal team acknowledged that some conflicts did arise, particularly in one site where there was tension between law enforcement and non-law enforcement participants. In this case, facilitators implemented creative solutions like one-on-one breakout sessions to address these issues. Some service providers in that site also expressed discomfort with law enforcement being in uniform during sessions, which contributed to the conflict. However, the internal team felt that these conflicts were ultimately handled as best as they could have been and were not disruptive to the overall goal of the co-design process.

"So more important than the way that we kind of structured how to try to overcome that conflict was the resiliency and hopefulness of those in the community." [ID3 – Internal]

While some participants noted that they had prior relationships with other participants in the co-design process, they found that these relationships were strengthened throughout the process. However, other individuals underscored that negative external interactions led to last-minute changes in solutions that increased conflict between law enforcement and people who use drugs.

"..their relationship was that officer arrested them before, or maybe their experience was the chief of the jail was like, "Oh, I know your name," right, from them being in there. And so I got to see those relationships kind of bloom, if you will, because they say, "That's who I was. That's not who I am today," right? So that was really cool. But for me, it gave me a more intimate setting where it's not necessarily work talk. Right? And so it became more personable." [ID15]

11.4. Suggestions for Improving the Process

For future co-design processes, both participants and internal team members emphasized the need for tailoring engagement and session designs to the specific dynamics of each community. Several participants stressed the importance of understanding contextual factors and catering to local factors, such as community history, culture, and the specific challenges faced. They suggested ensuring more consistent involvement from law enforcement agencies and even extending the reach to other government officials who could provide accountability and support for the group's efforts. One participant highlighted the importance of identifying which level of government had the most influence to secure greater buy-in and ensure the sustainability of the co-design process. Additionally, participants recommended broadening the diversity within the group of people with lived experience, particularly by engaging individuals who are early in recovery or still facing challenges in the criminal justice system. They also suggested involving court personnel to address systemic barriers, as their influence over legal outcomes and recovery efforts could play a crucial role in shaping solutions.

The internal team underscored the need for continued support after the co-design process, suggesting the development of community facilitators who could create their own toolboxes of knowledge and resources. They proposed narrowing down the scope of potential projects and providing clearer guidelines for what could be realistically achieved. Another internal concern was the challenge of travel and logistics in non-urban communities, which has posed difficulties in facilitating consistent sessions during the implementation phase.

"I think it's really great that you have people with lived experience. The people with lived experience that were there all are working in the job. What about adding people who maybe are struggling or at the beginning of their journey? Sometimes it's pretty shocking. It was shocking to me to-- I did the homeless count a few weeks ago at our local lighthouse where they feed. There's a lot of people there that I didn't come in touch with that I didn't know were out there because they weren't in the criminal justice system." [ID8]

"Know your audience, right? Where are you going to go? You're going to go to the city, you're going to go to the county. Reach out, figure out, what's the historical context of whatever you're trying to do? What would be the bumps, the pushbacks from the community?" [ID5]

12. Internal Team Perceptions of Replicability and Timeline

12.1. Replicability of the Process

All members of the internal team felt that the co-design process was replicable and should be expanded to other counties in Washington. Most of the internal team members participated as facilitators during the first implementation of the co-design process and reiterated that the co-design process ensures that local policies align with community values. Internal team members underscored the importance of balancing structure and flexibility in the co-design sessions, as well as having facilitators who could tailor their approaches to the unique circumstances present at each site. Given the implementation of the co-design process across several rounds, the internal team felt that tailored and targeted solutions to local communities would allow for the prioritization of community needs. Of note, some internal team members shared that more effort into attaining buy-in from community partners would make the process more sustainable in the long run.

“I think having strong buy-in from the stakeholder groups and I also think sooner in the process, finding a home [...] it is clear that there needs to be someone or somebody that is willing to kind of say, I’ve got the torch and I will carry it.” [ID1 – Internal Team]

““There’s been very different dynamics, very different people, very political kind of climates, demographics and it [the co-design process] has still worked consistently. So I think in that sense it’s pretty flexible enough that it can be replicable. Yeah, I think the only thing is for it to be replicable successfully is being a good facilitator but otherwise the template is quite easy to take anywhere.”” [ID4 – Internal Team]

12.2. Timeline of the Process

The internal team provided various responses to whether the timeline for the development and implementation of the co-design solution was sufficient. A majority of the internal team noted that although the codesign process was spread over two years, the timeline for the implementation of site solutions was still short and that sites may benefit from more implementation time. At the same time, there was an important conversation around striking the right balance between having sufficient time for participants to tangibly develop a project and elongating the process such that people would lose enthusiasm and momentum for the project. The internal team also highlighted the possibility of including a dedicated project manager to ensure that co-design processes were on track with project timelines and communication between partners remained clear and consistent.

"I think that if it had been any shorter, they wouldn't have had time to pull everything together. And yet it was just... But it was almost too long. You know, it's like it hits right in a good balance, I think. I used to think that it took a long time. But coming into the tail end of the stretch with the two that I was actively involved with, it became a push to try to get everything done in time. So I think that the timeline is pretty good. Any shorter wouldn't give people enough time to develop the project, their program, their process enough, or get enough concrete, tangible things in line that they could move on without the facilitation team. And any longer, I think people would lose the enthusiasm to do it." [ID5 –Internal Team]