



Developing a Sense of Belonging Through a Community of Practice

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Behavioral Health & Habilitation Administration
Behavioral Health & Treatment Centers**



Agenda

1. What are the Behavioral Health Treatment Centers (BHTCs)?
2. Why Belonging Matters in Behavioral Health
3. The Community of Practice (CoP)
4. CoP in Action at BHTCs
5. Building a Culture of Belonging
6. Barriers to Equity Implementation
7. Strategies to Overcome Barriers



Objectives

- Recognize the power of community as a source of belonging and shared wisdom.
- Explore how Communities of Practice (CoP) support knowledge-sharing and address workplace culture through the practice of Equity, Access and Belonging.
- Understand how CoP engagement fosters psychological safety among staff.
- Gain tools to navigate challenges in advancing belonging through your community of practice.



What are the BHTCs?

Behavioral Health and Treatment Centers (BHTCs) were created as an alternative to Washington's main state-operated psychiatric facilities, Western State Hospital and Eastern State Hospital.

BHTCs are smaller units designed to provide people-centered care for residents who need mental health treatment.



Reflection

“Take a moment and dream. What is the space where you truly feel belonging?”

What does that look like for you?”

The Power of Bridging: How to Build a World Where We All Belong

john a. powell

Why belonging matters in behavioral health



57% of employees felt their companies fell short in ensuring that they felt included and valued (Dressler, 2023).



Effects of non-belonging

Decreased productivity and performance (*Boland et al., 2025*)

30% turnover and attrition of providers in the public behavioral health care sector (*Hallet et al., 2024*)



Impact of the sense of belonging

50% lower turnover rate,

56% higher job performance,

Resulting in a substantial increase in annual saving of more than \$52 million (*Carr et al., 2019*)

Documented impacts of non-belonging vs. belonging

Effects of non-belonging on behavioral health care providers

- Decline in health and wellbeing
- Decrease in clinical judgement
- Feelings of detachment

Effects of non-belonging on behavioral health care teams

- Communication breakdowns and reduced collaboration
- Decreased morale among staff

Effects of non-belonging on patient care

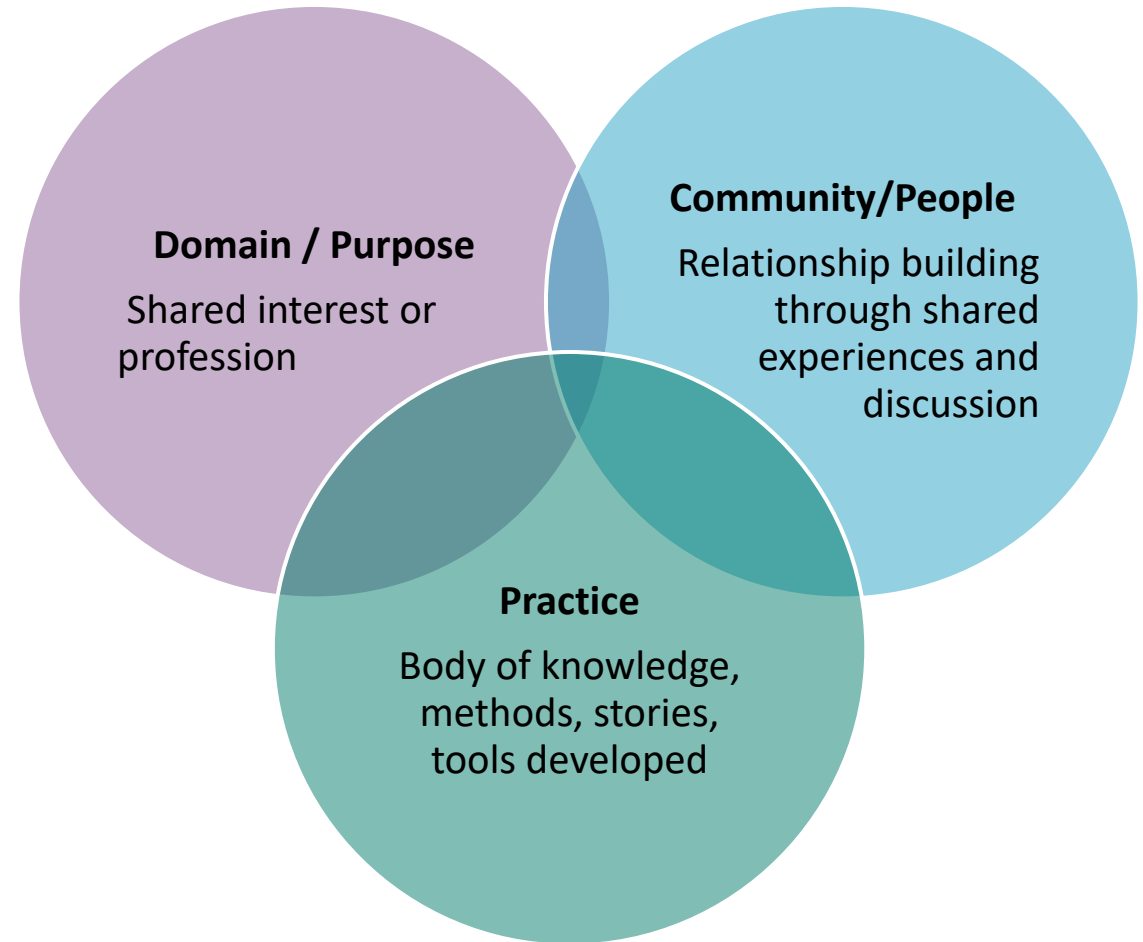
- Compromised patient care
- Impaired patient-provider relationships

Impact of the sense of belonging

- 2.5 times less likely to experience burnout (*SHRM, 2024*)
- 75% fewer sick days (Carr et al., 2019)
- Enhanced trust in providers, adherence to treatment plans, and overall well-being (*Halding, Wahki, & Heggdal, 2010; Lafferty et al., 2022*)

The Community of Practice

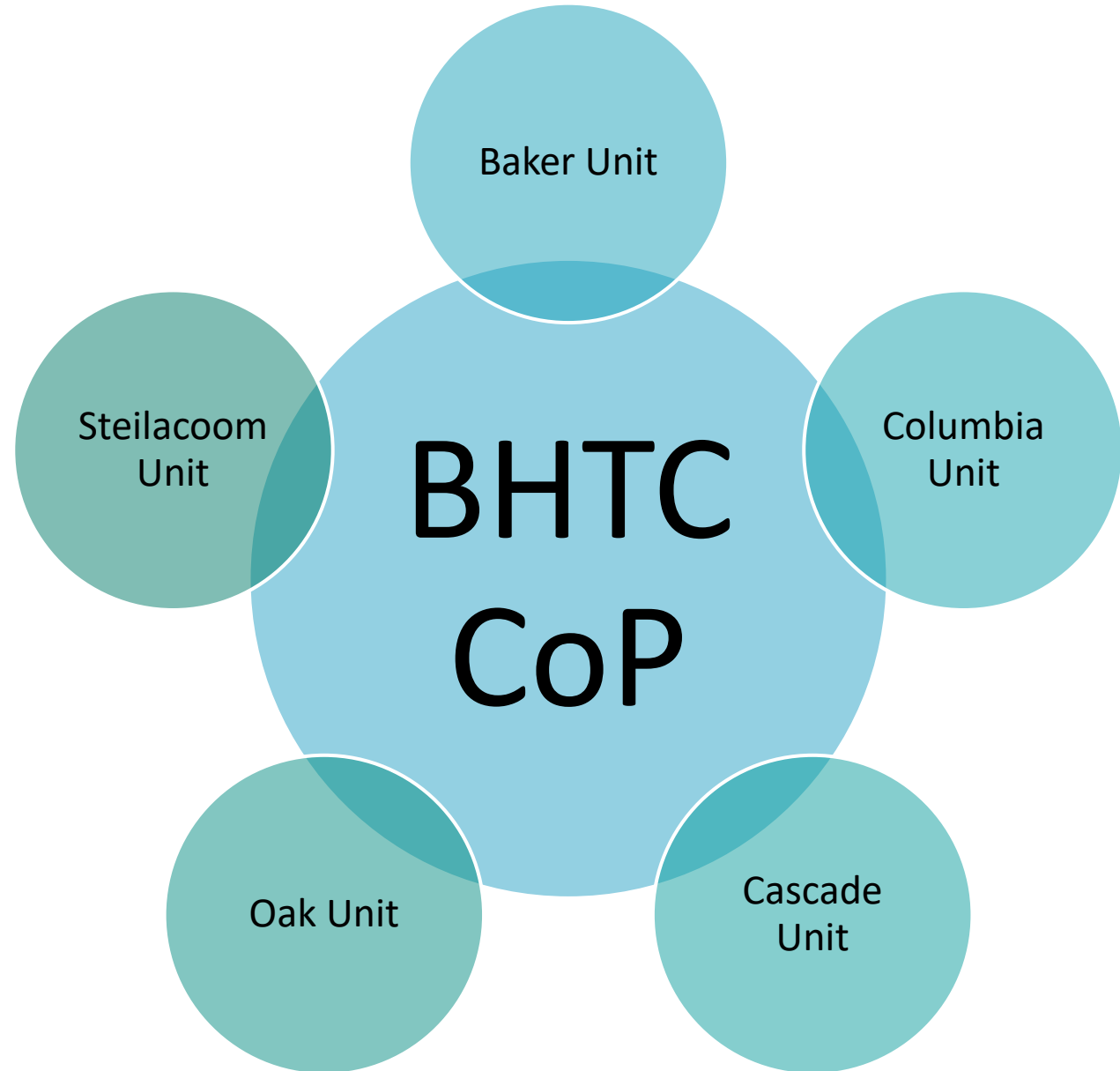
A **Community of Practice (CoP)** is a group of people who share a common interest, concern, or passion for a particular topic or domain, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting regularly.



Behavioral Health & Treatment Centers CoP

in Action

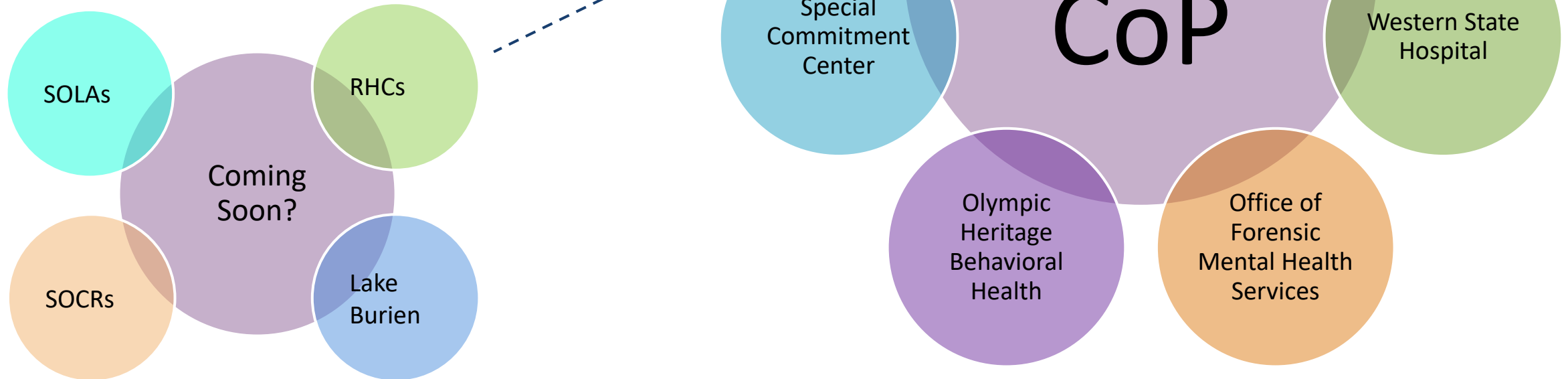
Micro Level



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CoP in Action

Macro Level



Building a culture of belonging

Psychological safety, defined as an individual's "sense of being able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career (Grailey, et. al., 2021)" and at a group level as "a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999)."

BHTC CoP guiding principles

Equity

- Every member's perspective matters.
- Expertise is recognized in all forms, not just academic or positional.
- Dialogue is structured to elevate "quiet" voices, not simply invite them.

Diversity

- Diversity in all its forms is valued and celebrated.

Access

- Resources, spaces, and opportunities are designed to be inviting and supportive of everyone, regardless of ability or background.

Inclusion

- Everyone is welcomed, respected, and empowered to contribute.
- Belonging is cultivated through intentional practices of inclusion, not assumed.

Common institutional barriers to equity and belonging implementation



LACK OF
UNDERSTANDING:
IMPACT AND VALUE



LACK OF GOALS AND
METRICS



LEADERSHIP
DISCONNECT

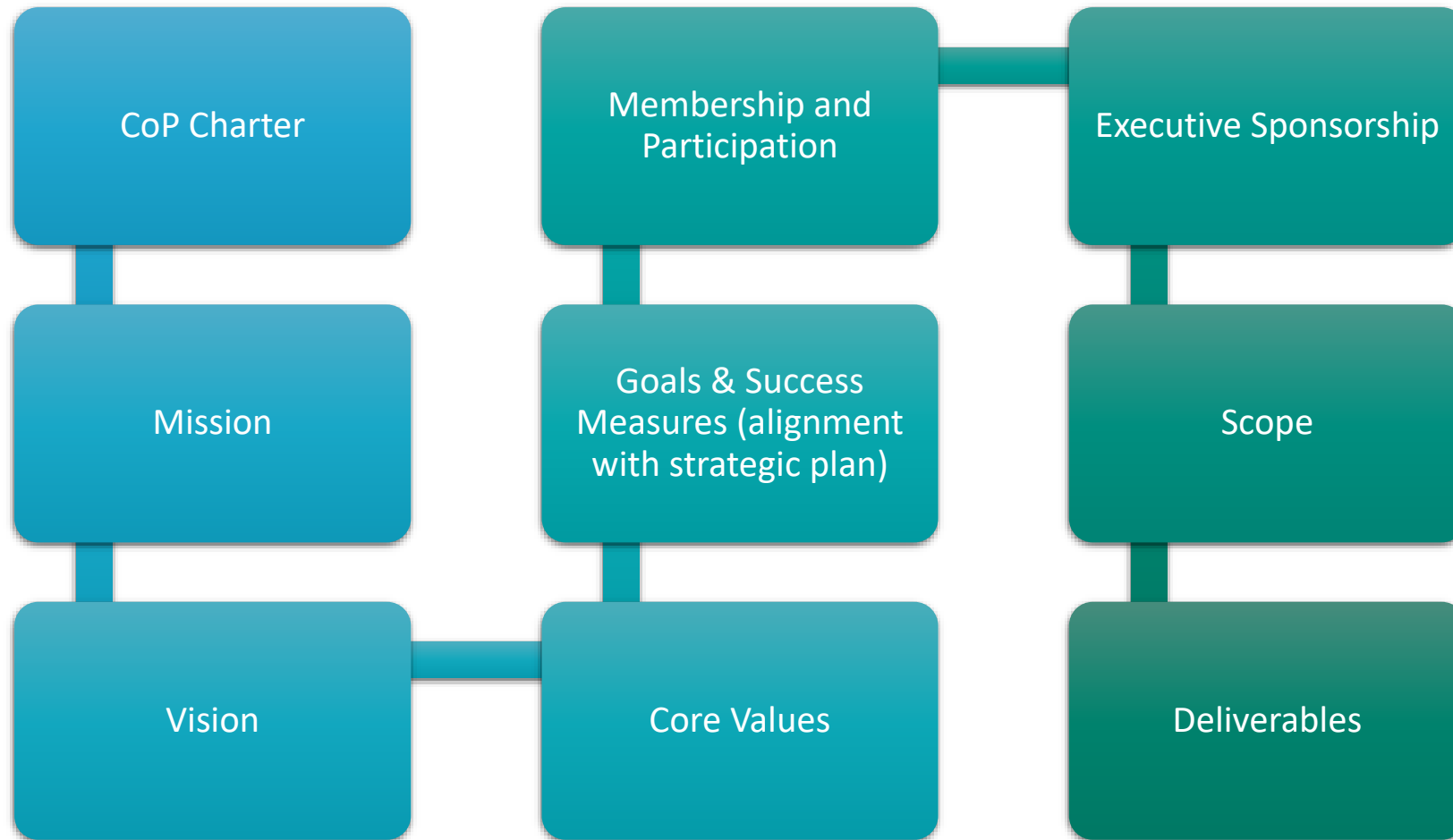


CULTURAL RESISTANCE
AND FEAR



BUDGETARY
RESTRICTIONS

Strategies to overcome barriers





Reflection

“What changes are you willing to make, to transform the spaces you inhabit, into ones in which everyone can experience a sense of belonging?”

*The Power of Bridging: How to Build a World Where We
All Belong*

john a. powell

Thank you!

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