

The Cultural Agency Toolkit

An Implementation Science Protocol for Scholar-Musician-Advocate to Build Community-based Resilience

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Background

Cultural agency refers to a range of creative activities that contribute to communities, including research, pedagogy, activism, and the arts. Specifically, cultural agency is the capacity of groups of individuals to perform intentionally, make creative choices and narrative, and shape their inter-relationships and social environment. Instead of being passive recipients of culture, the agents are often actively engaged in creative expression, storytelling, and activism for sustainable cultural changes. It focuses on bridging communications across different stakeholders in each community and using shared values, beliefs, heritage, and practices for purposeful action, from artistic projects to community engagement, to ensure local voices drive cultural sustainability.¹

Based on Cultural Agency Model, I adopted two key implementation science frameworks, including the Promoting Action on Research Implementation in Health Services (PARiHS)² and the Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance (RE-AIM)³ models to develop the following 5-step toolkit for building community resilience through musician-scholar advocacy and musical performance in underserved communities. The goal of this toolkit is to demonstrate the role and concrete steps for those young musician-scholars who aspire to reach out to community residents in underserved areas, empower their self-efficacy to address their mental health problems, and foster community resilience and cohesion.

Toolkit Steps

Step 1. Theoretical Framework: The Biopsychosocial Core

Before students begin, they must understand the "Active Ingredients" of the intervention.

- Neuro-Physiological Impact: How synchronized rhythm and melody modulate cortisol levels and stimulate oxytocin.
- Psychosocial Resonance: Using music to bridge the "Cultural Gap," specifically for marginalized groups (e.g., METCO students or AAPI seniors) to foster a sense of belonging.
- Cultural Agency: The transition from being a musician to a proactive cultural facilitator to empower passive listeners to become active participants in a shared cultural narrative.¹

Step 2. Exploration (Community Needs Assessment)

Implementation science begins with understanding the environment (Evidence, Context, Facilitation from the PARIHS framework).

- Stakeholder Analysis: Identify the "Gatekeepers" (e.g., Nursing Home Directors, Community Center Organizers).
- Needs Assessment: What is the number of residents? Potential reach of the targeted audience by event schedule? Is the community suffering from social isolation (seniors), identity stress (youth), or systemic burnout (healthcare workers)?
- Cultural Matching: Selecting repertoire not based on technical difficulty, but on Cultural Relevance. (e.g., performing the Yellow River Concerto for AAPI seniors to trigger collective memory and pride).

Step 3. Preparation (The "Train-the-Trainer" Protocol)

Training student musicians to move from "Musicians" to "Facilitators."

- The Narrative Bridge: Trainers are taught to draft 2-minute "Storytelling Interludes" between pieces. These stories must link the music to themes of resilience, trauma recovery, or cultural heritage.
- De-Escalation & Empathy Training: Preparing musicians to handle the emotional responses of the audience (e.g., memory-care patients reacting to music).
- Technical Adaptability: Learning to perform in "non-ideal" acoustic spaces (cafeterias, gyms) without losing the essential quality of the music (e.g., a good dose of maintaining 45 minutes of high engagement of performance to ensure therapeutic saturation).

Step 4. Implementation (The Performance Intervention)

Executing the "Cultural Agency" model with fidelity, which should be maintained through a standardized checklist for all trainer-musicians.

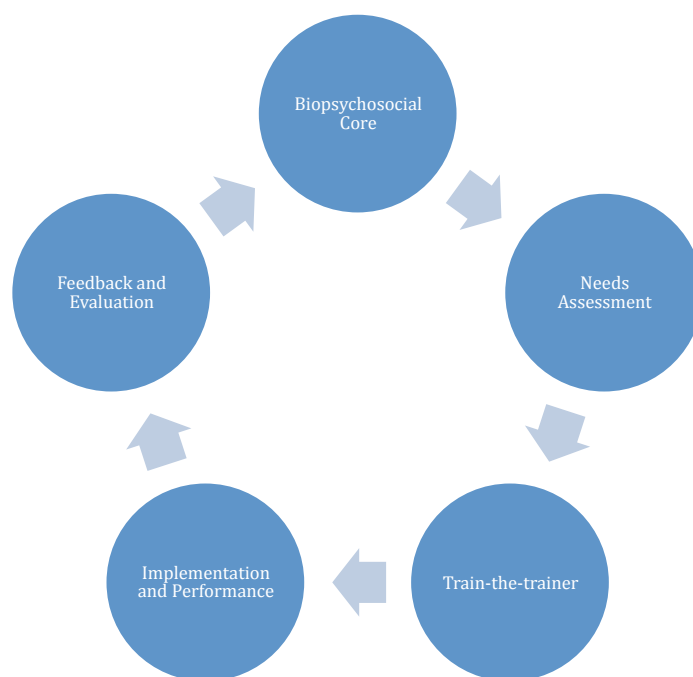
- Standardized checklist may include: 1. Narrative interludes included; 2. Audience feedback solicited; 3. Cultural relevance of repertoire ascertained.
- Active Engagement (The Call-and-Response): Instead of a "dark stage" model, musicians use "Inter-active Listening" techniques—asking the audience for emotional feedback or rhythmic participation.
- Peer-Modeling: Older student musicians paired with younger ones to model the "Scholar-Citizen" ethos, ensuring the values of the organization are passed down.

Step 5. Evaluation (The Feedback Loop)

How we measure the "Implementation Success" and inform the stakeholders to maintain their buy-in and sustainability at both individual and system levels.

- Qualitative Coding: Using the qualitative research methods such as focus groups and key informant interviews, trainers collect post-performance "micro-interviews" from the audience.
- Quantitative Metrics: Tracking attendance, "engagement duration," and participant-reported mood scales (Pre- and Post-Concert).
- Refining the Model: Using both qualitative and quantitative data to adjust the "Toolkit" for the next cycle.
- Inform key stakeholders through advocacy (e.g., local, regional and national platforms) about the success stories and lessons learned for improvements and program sustainability.

The Cultural Agency Toolkit 5-Step Diagram



References:

1. Sommer D. Cultural Agency in the Americas. Duke University Press; 2006.
2. Kitson A, Harvey G, McCormack B. Enabling the implementation of evidence-based practice: a conceptual framework. *Qual Health Care*. 1998;7(3):149–58.
3. Glasgow RE, Vogt TM, Boles SM. Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *Am J Public Health* 1999; 89: 1322–27.