

Community Engagement: Asset Development and Models of Collective Thinking



Creating a positive future begins in human conversation.

The simplest and most powerful investment any member of a community can make
is to begin talking with other people
as though it mattered.

-Adapted from Who Will Tell the People
by W. Greider



These engagements are based on the belief that...

- When people hear the stories of others, understanding, sense of community and belonging develops
- Enthusiasm and energy are heightened when the focus is on what a group, organization or individual does well.
- Genuine inclusion promotes a mindset that connects individual thinking to the whole.
- wisdom and mindfulness are socially constructed and democratically mobilized

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Preface

In the coming decades we will no doubt experience a fundamental change in the way we live together, govern, communicate and collaborate.

People are waking up to a new role in an active and deeply democratic way and proving themselves open to alternative ideologies. Think 'Idle no More' and the 'Occupy Movement'. The potential for social change through the liberation of collective thinking is impossible to forecast. This awakening holds the power to move us to new and exciting territory.

These experiences are designed to open community exploration both as a collective and as a reflection of individual assets and interests. The sessions are intentionally sequenced to build understand that will lead naturally to thoughtful action and provide opportunity to:

- Build community
- Enhance relationships
- Deepen understanding of history and story
- Identify and share strengths and interests
- Co construct and envision a future that maximizes individual and collective strengths
- Construct plans of action that are collaborative, inclusive and generationally sensitive

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and
As long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work,
the more I live.

I rejoice in life for its own sake.
Life is no brief candle for me.

It is sort of a splendid torch which I have got hold of
For a moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible
Before handing it on to the future generations.

-George Bernard Shaw

Opening Session

Activity 1

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

Find a partner and read the George Bernard Shaw quote together. Interview one another with a focus on the following questions. Be prepared to share the essential elements in your collective stories in 40 minutes

- Think of a time when you felt part of a vibrant and healthy community.
- A time when there was an exceptional collection of energy and commitment.
- What was going on? What role did you play?
- What factors or elements contributed most to the experience?

Record the most significant factors on the sticky notes provided. One per page

* Refer to Guidelines for Asking Open and Exploratory Questions (attached)

Activity 2

Finding commonality

As a large group sort the factors from activity 1 into cluster areas.

Debriefing Questions for the facilitator

- What were the threads of commonality in your experiences?
- What implications might these have for us the community?

Activity 3

Building a future

Work in small group of 3-5. Brainstorm ideas for possible community engagement that reflect the list of common high points generated in each cluster area. Be prepared to post and present your ideas.

Once all contributions are posted have participants rank order according to community preference and viability. Move to plans of action.

Asking Open and Exploratory Questions

Your role in the small group is to listen deeply and ask questions that will help clarify and inform your understanding of what is being said. Resist the temptation to agree, relate to a personal experience, make declarative statements or judgment on what you hear. Your goal is to cultivate a culture of curiosity, exploration, risk taking and expansive thinking.

During group discussion practice asking open and explorative questions. A powerful question is:

- Thought-provoking and invites reflection and pushes to deeper meaning
- Expands possibilities
- Brings underlying assumptions to light
- Stimulates curiosity and creativity

Open-ended question stems

Tell me more about

Can you help me understand what you mean by....

How might you describe?

In what ways did the situation change because of...

Where did this idea come from?

How might you explain ___'s decision to.....?

What would you say was the most important aspect of

What implication might his have on.....?

What is the significance of?

How did the actions you describe change the outcome?

What changed for you?

How do you see this idea connecting to?

What opportunities might this open up.. ?

Second Evening

The first evening focused on building community engagement. The second evening will focus on you the individual. What are you passionate about and how might this be leveraged for the overall health and vibrancy of the community.

Activity 1

What makes your heart sing.

Find a partner and interview one another with a focus on the following questions.

- Think of a time when you felt exhilarated. What were you doing? Who else was there? What make the experience so positive?
- What might this experience suggest about your points of passion or what energize you most?

Activity 2

Sign me up

Refer to your points of passion. How might your interests and talents support or inform the plans of action that were developed on the first evening?

Write your name and interest or talent on a sticky and place it next to one or more of the initiatives under consideration.

*Building implementation committees

Examine each initiative to ensure there is sufficient commitment. What gaps need filling? Are there areas of overrepresentation?

Third Evening

Activity 1 Lasting Legacy

Refer back to the George Bernard Shaw quote from our first night.

Find a partner and talk to one another with a focus on the following questions.



Think about the light given to us by those that came before.

What beliefs were foundational do you think?

What values are most dearly held?

What did the experiences of the past illuminate for us?

What light might we pass on?

Activity 2

Provocative proposition

The Provocative Proposition is an invitation to take your new insights and imagine how they might help create a more exceptional future. A Provocative Proposition is usually stated as a What if....

Given what you have learned about community engagement, leveraging assets and generationally accountable what might the future hold?

Refer to the criteria below and create one or more PP's. that beginning with

What if..

Criteria for A Provocative Proposition

Does it stretch, challenge or interrupt the status quo?

~Is it grounded in possibility?

~Does it provide guidance for the future?

~Is it stated in the affirmative?

~Does it invite the extraordinary?

Be prepared to share and post.

"I know there is strength in the differences between us.
I know there is comfort where we overlap."
- Ani Difranco

Supplemental Reading

Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change.

Cooperrider, D., Sorensen, P., Whitney, D., and Yaeger, T. (2000)

A seminal examination of Appreciative Inquiry within the context of organization development and systems change.

Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership.

C. Roland Christenson. Harvard Business School (1991)

Examines the theory and practice of Case Method at HBS and the transformative nature of discussion teaching.

Mapping Dialogue: A research project profiling dialogue tools and processes for social change.

Commissioned by the German Technical Cooperative.

This collection profiles **a number of approaches to community development** that are **inclusive** and build collectivity. Some approaches are designed for small groups while others can accommodate of to 5000 participants.

<http://www.nonformality.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2006/12/mappingdialogue.pdf>