

# Community & Relationships

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## 5 Techniques for Building Relationships

### **Dialogue and Trust:**

Dialogue is at the heart of every relationship. The quality of the conversation or lack there of is often the determining factor for a successful collaboration. Dialogue builds trust and the more trust there is between people, the better the dialogue. As you can see, one builds the other.

**When to use:** In some ways, the better question is when do we not use dialogue? In every stage of the collaboration, be it from idea stage to the renewal and wind down stage, dialogue is central. Dialogue can be informal and it can be formal.

### **Here are a few of my favorite deliberate dialogue methods.**

**A Conversation Café:** A simple but wonderful tool for hosting fantastic and meaningful conversation. Everything you need to know about this method can be found at the site below. There is even a four page mini host guide to get you started.

<http://www.conversationcafe.org/hosts.html>

**Future Search:** Future Search is a PLANNING MEETING that helps people transform their capability for action very quickly. The meeting is task-focused. It brings together 60 to 80 people in one room or hundreds in parallel rooms.

Future Search brings people from all walks of life into the same conversation - those with resources, expertise, formal authority and need. They meet for 16 hours spread across three days. People tell stories about their past, present and desired future. Through dialogue, they discover their common ground. Only then do they make concrete action plans. Go to the site for a full guide and "how to":

<http://www.futuresearch.net/index.cfm>

**Open Space:** This is a way to get all people in a group, no matter how big, and have their say on equal terms. They make their own agenda with what they have passion for and they organize the discussions themselves. To learn how to host an Open Space, go to:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org>

**Peer Input Process:** A fantastic way to help people talk about their issues and to ask for strategic help. See attached for a way that Tamarack hosts Peer Input Processes.

## Peer Input Process



Working on complex community issues is time consuming and tough. People working in community organizations often come across challenges they struggle to overcome on their own.

The Peer Input Process is a technique adapted from peer coaching techniques used by executives in large corporations designed to assist people in obtaining their input in a relatively quick and structured way from their peer group.

### **Step 1 – Introduction** (5 minutes)

The Facilitator introduces the purpose of the Peer Input Session, the person-seeking-input, and the steps in the Peer Input Process.

### **Step 2 – Unpacking** (10 Minutes)

The person-seeking-input takes 10 minutes (if there is time, it is best to use 20 minutes) to share the issue or challenge they are experiencing and finishes their presentation with a concrete question they would like feedback from their peers on.

### **Step 3 - Questions** (20 Minutes)

- *Clarifying questions (10 Minutes)* - Peers now have 10 minutes to ask very precise clarifying questions to gain a better understanding and more detail.
- *Probing questions (10 minutes)* - Peers have the opportunity to ask deeper more probing questions (usually start with 'Why' or 'How').

### **Step 4 – Group Discussion** (20 Minutes)

The peer group now has a chance to talk to each other in answering the question posed. The presenter cannot at any time interject – they are simply “listening in” to the conversation.

### **Step 5 – Reflections** (5-10 Minutes)

The Person-seeking-input reflects on the process and what they may or may not have learned, and shares how they might proceed with their question based on the group's input.

### **Step 6 – Wrap Up**

The Facilitator wraps up the event.

## Top 100 Partners Exercise

**Consider the top 100 people and organizations in your community that, “if they were working together to change the community toward the vision you represent” you could realize the change you want to see.**

The easiest and **least effective** way for partnerships to emerge is to just let them happen. I am a huge believer in emergence but given that partnerships take so much time to develop, I feel it is very important to know who you want your partners to be and to develop a strategy for building these relationships.

Here is a five step process that individuals or groups can use to be much more deliberate in building strategic partnerships.

**When to use:** This exercise is most helpful when first building the collaboration and after the idea is in draft form. It is also useful as you are holding consultations for the development of the community plan to ensure you are engaging key stakeholder ideas. It is again a useful exercise once you have completed the community plan and want to double check to ensure those not yet involved but should be are.

**Step one:** Consider the issue you hope to address in your community. List all the organizations (top 100) that make up the system around the issue – if possible, identify the people that lead them or work in them. If your issue is poverty reduction, consider the agencies that serve the poor, food banks, low-income neighborhood centers, homeless shelter. Consider the employers that hire low-income workers, be they private or public. Also, consider those business associations that represent those employers like your chamber of commerce. Consider all levels of government that support or fund programs that help the poor. Lastly, identify any citizen organizations that have been developed by those poor for the poor. Maybe a single parent support group. Keep writing down names until you cannot think of any more.

### **Optional, but a useful image:**

On a large piece of paper, write the name of the collaborative you are involved in.

Visualize all those in your community who have similar interests, including existing partners.

Brainstorm those organizations that make up the system you are hoping to affect using the four categories of Business, Voluntary, Government and people affected by the issue. After listing them all on the right hand side of the page in front of you (map them out by drawing lines using colors to represent the strength or nature of the relationship, i.e. Green for strong, pink for weak, etc., on each line), write what you might do to strengthen that relationship or group of relationships.

**Step two:** Sort through the list and identify the people you know best. Organize the lists in groups such as Business, Government, Voluntary Sector and Low-income Leaders.

**Step three:** Now rank the lists - such as identifying the top three in each list. Use specific criteria for ranking - this is how I do it. Those individuals that I or anyone in

our group has a close personal relationship with get 5 points – for those with a lesser relationship, they get a lower rating. How do you know you have a good relationship? If you can ask this person a reasonable favor and if because of your relationship they would most often say yes – it is a level 5 relationship. Now, also rank each contact for ability to contribute to implementing the vision. Again, if they have a lot of influence or resources - give them a five. Lastly, rank them for “readiness to partner.” How closely does your idea line up with their thinking? Are they in the midst of a huge change that your idea fits with nicely? If it does not and they are doing their own thing, the rating may be lower.

**Step four:** Choose the partners you most want to approach first. This is most often called “ranking your prospect list.” This stage often requires some research. The more you know about a potential partner, the easier it is to customize “the ask” in a way that they can easily see the need and benefits of their participation.

In this step, I normally look for two things. The first is a set of names that will give me some quick partnerships – those people I know well and am fairly sure will join in if ask. The second is those on my list with significant influence. An example of this is the Mayor of the city or a leading business person. These are people who bring credibility to the issue and, once they are on your side, it is often much easier to bring on other key community influencers.

**Step five:** Make the approach but go slow! I have a simple rule – I never ask a partner to commit on my first visit with them. I use the first meeting to introduce the idea and try to leave the meeting with a commitment for a second meeting. At the end of the first meeting I ask, “Is there other information I can send to you, or questions that I might answer when we get together again?”

This five step process is not conclusive but, rather, it is a way to be deliberate about the building of relationships and to identify the “top 100” organizations and individuals that can contribute to the change you want to see for your community.

## Build A Relational Database

**Every event that you hold and every conversation you have about the change you want to see is an opportunity to build a relationship. By acquiring email addresses or business cards, you have an opportunity to keep people informed and, hopefully, get them excited about the work you are doing. Imagine after one year you might have more than 1,000 names in your database and a short note for each as to why they are important and interested in your work, and how they have been involved to date.**

**When to use:** In every stage of collaboration, this is important. I would suggest this is the **most important discipline** of any collaborative organization. Keeping a relational database creates a discipline that keeps the relationships formed current and deliberate.

**What is a relational database?** We all have mailing lists and, at times, we use excel spreadsheets and, at other times, we might use specific software that allows us to keep the names and addresses of the people we connect with regularly. A relational database can be just that a listing of names and contact information. What makes it relational is that we have developed categories for each contact so they can be sorted by interest or level of importance to us.

### **A few tips:**

- Every event you hold is an important opportunity to build your database. Make sure that you find a way to get names and email addresses. This might involve a sign up sheet that is passed around. Or, find a reason to send some compelling information after the meeting and ask for email addresses before they leave. If you have a newsletter, have them sign up for that.
- This is a discipline! In other words, it must become something you do everyday and for every event. Even if you already have the contact information, you may now have more information about a person or able to track a specific event and interest they might have. Consider a one year goal? A thousand names one day, one event at a time.
- Consider using the database as a way of tracking engagement. I cannot think of a better way to track how many people have been involved in the initiative to date and their level of interest and contribution. Make sure this is part of your evaluation criteria.
- Consider buying a data base that is built specifically for this purpose. The one we use and can be purchased for around \$200 is the Act data base go to [www.act.com](http://www.act.com) for more information.
- Use the database! The best way to see the power of the database is to develop a short e – letter that provides a compelling update of your work on a regular basis. Some might say the internet is part of what is allowing collaborative work to grow at that pace it is. How easy it is to keep everyone informed.

## Communication and Learning

**Communication is critical to a collaborative effort. Not just any communication – it must be purposeful and consistent if it is to be effective. We have found that communication that helps people learn is more effective than communication that keeps people up to date on the work going on (we realize both are needed). By creating a continual learning system, we help people engage in the ideas around the change we want to see and, as such, build their commitment to contributing to the ideas becoming a reality.**

**When to use:** In every stage of the collaboration, communication and learning is critical. Consider a deliberate communication system that includes events, a newsletter and a website, as well as “hard copy” papers and documents that people can keep or pass along.

### **Tips for communication:**

- Build a learning community, not just a constituency. A learning community is one in which every member is seen as a contributor and participant to the learning that is occurring. It allows you to build a body of practice, most often housed on your website. It sees every event and communication with members of the learning community as an opportunity to build knowledge and understanding.

See **Cultivating Communities of Practice** by Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, William M. Snyder for a great resource on building learning communities.

- Email is an effective communication tool, as it allows us to keep information in front of people easily. Be deliberate and consistent but do not over use this tool. Consider a bi-weekly communication (ideal) or monthly, but no more than that.
- See communication as building a learning system. We recommend that you develop an annual learning plan for your collaborative. Consider an annual learning theme and how you might use events and papers to further the learning communities understanding of the issue you are promoting.
- Face-to-face learning is critical in building trust and understanding. Use face-to-face events for building this trust and by giving people plenty of time for communication with each other. See virtual learning as enhancing the face-to-face learning events.
- Make it easy for people to learn. People are overwhelmed today with the amount of information they receive. Animate knowledge using quick summaries of a document and then by giving people the option to download the whole thing. Use pictures to make your products user-friendly. Consider how you might make each document personal and fun. Telling stories about individuals is very effective, especially if you are telling the story as a way of animating the change you are hoping others emulate.

## Celebration

**Saying thank you might seem like an easy thing to do, but it is done far too seldom. Our experience is that asking for help may be the biggest compliment you can give any person, especially if you are able to say thank you to them in an authentic way. People love to be needed and want to know that their help made a difference.**

**When to use:** Always! Build a culture of generosity – a community where thank you is a way of being.

### **Some celebration ideas:**

- As leader, the ability to say thank you even for the small things may be the most important competency a collaborative leader can have. This sounds easy! It is not. As we get caught up in the pressures of our job, when we work 50 hours a week, when things are taking longer than they should, we become depleted and tired. As we are constantly asking people for help, we are the ones saying thank you and are seldom the ones being thanked. Over time, this depletes our energy and we lose a sense of gratefulness. Thank you and please are replaced with, "they did not follow through again," "they could have done better," or even worse, we replace a spirit of generosity with a spirit of blame. Guard against this, consider hiring a professional coach or asking a mentor to coach you through this process of leadership. Ask them to help you maintain a spirit of thank you and generosity.
- Use your communication and learning events to say thank you. Consider profiling a leader and their work. Mention a few people during your introductory comments at a community or leadership roundtable meeting.
- Hold an annual celebration event! Recognize people and accomplishments.
- Establish awards and make them generous and unique. We once had a famous artist donate prints of a painting with the theme of working together to give to people. We would share these and tell the person's story. It is interesting how these types of awards became a vehicle not only to say thank you, but also to motivate others in the community. People love to be part of thankful organizations.
- Be personal and care about people in every aspect of their lives. Go to funerals, send flowers, and buy lunch. Ask people how it is going and take the time to hear what is really happening with their children, in their extended family or with their health. Try and remember ways to care. Caring of course is the authentic thank you.

