

# Activity 5.4 Seeing Communities as Partners<sup>1</sup>

## Description

This activity encourages participants to imagine communities as partners, rather than recipients of funding, information, or charity. Instead of seeing communities as having problems that "we" need to solve, it enables participants to see that communities also have already existing assets and capacities to solve problems.

## Learning Goals

- Develop an understanding of the existing strengths of a community, by taking inventory of existing assets and resources
- Develop an understanding of how to support and join the already existing momentum or movement to solve problems or advance a program
- Appreciate the need to engage communities with humility, the willingness to learn, and the skill of following rather than leading

## Practice (75 minutes)

Step One	<p><b>Break into small groups (4-8 ppl).</b></p> <p><b><i>In these small groups, work together to create two sets of "good questions" [See Activity 4.6 Asking Questions to Promote Curiosity and/or use the <a href="#">Question Chart</a>]:</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A list of questions that gathers information on the community members/stakeholders' definition and framing of an issue/topic and their perspective on this issue/topic.</li><li>2. A list of questions that gathers information on what assets and resources already exist in the community. These could be the individual capabilities, knowledge, or connections of community members; buildings, spaces or equipment; community organizations, groups, or businesses; etc.</li></ol>	15 min

<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Ritu Thomas (2023). Seeing Communities as Partners. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-5-civic-collaboration-1>

<b>Step Two</b>	<p><b>Within the small group, break into 2 subgroups:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first subgroup will be the Community Member group - each person will role-play one of the stakeholders/community members.</li> <li>• The second subgroup will be the Data Gathering group that will gather information from the community members.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Present an issue and a list of 2, 3 or 4 community stakeholders for this issue</i></b>, depending on the total number of people in each small group (i.e. 4, 6 or 8 people). [<a href="#">See Activity 5.2 Developing an Awareness of Stakeholders</a> and/or use the <a href="#">Identifying Stakeholders Worksheet</a>]</p> <p><b><i>Provide the Community Member subgroups with an information sheet</i></b> about each community stakeholder that describes their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• views on different aspects of this issue</li> <li>• lived experience of the problem</li> <li>• definition of the problem</li> <li>• individual assets/resources, like individual capabilities, knowledge, connections</li> <li>• community's common assets and resources, like buildings, spaces, equipment</li> <li>• community organizations, groups, or local businesses</li> </ul> <p><u>The second Data Gathering subgroup does not receive this information.</u></p>	<b>5 min</b>
<b>Step Three</b>	<p><b>Each subgroup then works separately</b> to define the problem as they see it and quickly draft an initial plan.</p>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>Step Four</b>	<p><b>The two subgroups come back together.</b></p> <p>The Data Gathering subgroup uses the two lists of questions to engage in a dialogue with the Community Member subgroup and gather as much information on the community members' definition and perspective of the problem, as well as individual and community assets &amp; resources.</p> <p>Both groups then work together to draft a new joint proposal using the new insight and information they gained from their discussion with each other.</p> <p>Once each small group is finished, have them write both their initial and updated proposals on a whiteboard, shared screen or other surface visible to everyone.</p>	<b>30 min</b>
<b>Step Five</b>	<p><b>Debrief.</b> As a full group, discuss the results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the proposals change with new information?</li> </ul>	<b>15 min</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What assumptions did each subgroup have about the issue that they were able to move beyond after talking to each other?</li></ul>	
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## Reflection Assignment

- What do you think members of a community feel when seen as partners in the process and included in decision-making?
- What effect does this have on the collaborative effort, solution and implementation of the solution?

## Practice Journal

This week, reflect on an experience where you received unsolicited advice or someone offered a solution to what they thought your problem was, without actually trying to understand how you defined or perceived what the problem was. Describe how you felt and how you responded to their advice and/or the solution they offered. Did you end up following their advice or did you feel resistance to doing so?

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [The Community Toolbox - Identifying Community Assets and Resources](#)
- [Organizing: People, Power, Change](#) - adapted from the work of Dr. Marshall Ganz (Tip: see worksheets in Appendix, pg. 42-49)
- [Marshall Ganz's Framework: People, Power, and Change](#) - another adaptation of the work of Dr. Marshall Ganz by Jacob Waxman (Tip: This is a quicker read with only 23 pages).
- [Ernesto Sirolli's TED Talk "Want to help someone? Shut up and listen!"](#) (Tip: This talk uses ample amounts of humor to emphasize the importance of engaging communities with humility and the willingness to learn, and why the first step in designing any collaborative community project or program is always to ask the people who live in a community what they know, think and want and to listen, really listen, to the answers!)

## Pro Tips

- If you have the time to do so, you can do this activity over two sessions to give the 2 subgroups the opportunity to switch roles, i.e. the Data Gathering subgroup becomes the Community Member subgroup & vice versa.
- During the second session, present a new issue and list the same number of community stakeholders for this new issue, according to the size of the small groups.
- Then repeat Steps 2-4 with the 2 subgroups within each small group switching roles.