



**COLLECTIVE
IMPACT FORUM**



Community Engagement Toolkit

Version 2.2
March, 2017

Data-driven strategies and community engagement strategies are not mutually exclusive. In order to achieve better results, many leaders in the public, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors are employing data-driven strategies, including evidence-based programs and collective impact. Often such efforts are seen as in conflict with community engagement. In fact, community engagement, when done well, should support and enhance the ability to achieve data-driven results.

Community engagement is about ensuring that those most impacted by social challenges have a say in designing and implementing solutions. The participation of intended beneficiaries and their families, neighbors, and trusted leaders can be an integral part of data-driven processes to achieve better results. And a shift in power where community members own and help produce the result will lead to greater impact. The following toolkit is meant to guide leaders and groups through a step by step process of building community engagement strategies that will achieve better results for children, families, and communities.

This toolkit was developed to expand upon the work highlighted in the Melody Barnes' and my essay: ***Community Engagement Matters (Now More Than Ever)*** in the **Stanford Social Innovation Review**, Spring, 2016. The research for the article was generously sponsored by **Results for America** in support of their **What Works Cities**. Thank you to Melody Barnes, whose wisdom and insights lifted up these ideas and this work.

In addition, this toolkit has benefitted from my work as Senior Advisor to **The Collective Impact Forum**, as a faculty member with **The Asset Based Community Development Institute**, and my own client work through **Leading Inside Out**.

This is an evolving toolkit and will be updated regularly. I welcome ideas, tips, feedback and additional tools. The goal is to support better engagement to achieve results. Thank you to my colleagues Dan Duncan, Keith Lewis, Reggie Moore, Fran Jemmott, Shawnie Dockery, and others who have shared ideas and feedback that have helped me evolve this.

Nothing about us without us!

Enjoy and Engage!

Paul Schmitz
March, 2017

Community Engagement Toolkit

T1: Be Result-driven & Purposeful

For the purposes of this toolkit, “community” refers to intended beneficiaries and their families, friends, neighbors, and the leaders of small community-based or faith-based groups who work most closely with them in the place they live.

Please answer this before you begin: **Why is community engagement important to your initiative? How will it contribute to your results?**

It is important to be clear, direct, and transparent about your purpose for engaging community. If you see engagement as something nice to do or just want to check a “community engagement” box and get it done, your engagement will fail and likely lead to greater distrust and conflict. If you sincerely see engagement as necessary to achieving better results, then proceed.

To do this, we must recognize that our best efforts, even when guided by data and evidence, will not succeed without community members’ experience, knowledge, relationships, skills, and participation.

“Doing to us, not with us, is a recipe for failure.” – Dr. Howard Fuller, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University

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Complete the following chart before going forward: What are the goals/outcomes of your initiative, how do you think engagement might advance those results, and what roles do you see community members playing to advance those results?

Goals/Outcomes	Why Engagement?	Roles for Community

Add more boxes as needed

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T2: Community Engagement Spectrum¹

Increasing Impact on Decision-Making and Implementation				
INFORMING	CONSULTING	INVOLVING	COLLABORATING	EMPOWERING
Providing balanced and objective information about new programs or services, and about the reasons for choosing them	Inviting feedback on alternatives, analyses, and decisions related to new programs or services	Working with community members to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are considered at every stage of planning and decision-making. We also engage their assets as partners to implement solutions.	Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services. Community members actively produce outcomes.	Giving community members sole decision-making authority over new programs or services, and lead work to implement solutions. Professionals only serve in consultative and supportive roles
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to your input and feedback, and let you know your ideas and concerns have influenced decisions	We will ensure your input and feedback is directly reflected in alternatives, and let you know how your involvement influenced decisions. We will engage you as partners to implement solutions.	We will co-create and co-produce solutions with you. You will be true partners in making and implementing decisions for the community, your advice and recommendations will be incorporated as much as possible.	We will support your decisions and work to implement solutions.
Fact sheets, newsletters, websites, open houses	Surveys, focus groups, community meetings and forums	Community organizing, leadership development, workshops	Advisory boards, seats on governing boards, engaging and funding as partners	Support full governance, leadership, and partnership

Choose your community engagement strategy, clarify the promise to community members, and then fulfill those promises. Engagement is obviously most robust on the right side of the diagram. This can also be read as a spectrum between buy-in and ownership. On the left side, we are often mobilizing people to support or provide limited input or feedback to our decisions. On the right side, we are organizing people to identify their interests and assets – they become deciders, outcome producers, advocates, leaders. It is about shifting power to community.

It is not always necessary, appropriate, or within your capacity to practice collaborative or empowering approaches, but you should push your assumptions and comfort to move as far right as appropriate. Moving to the right means giving up power, because this work is not about your power, but about community results.

¹ This is adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) www.iap2.org

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It is essential that wherever you are on the spectrum, you must be clear and transparent about your position and fulfill the promises of being there. The greatest tensions and conflicts come when leaders promise a more involved, collaborative, or empowering level of engagement but deliver an informing or consulting level. If you aspire to more engagement, communicate that and take clear steps that demonstrate your commitment is real. It is also important to be transparent about how much power you are willing to give away or not.

Where are your community engagement efforts now on the spectrum? Where do you aspire to be?

For where you aspire to be, what steps will you need to take to pursue that level of engagement? What power or control do you have to give up?

What expectations will you need to communicate and fulfill for community members?

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T3: Asset-Based Community Development

The core idea of **Asset-Based Community Development**¹ is that rather than begin by defining people and communities by their deficits and trying to fix them, you find their assets (experience, knowledge, skills, talents, passions, and relationships) and engage them. It is a place-based strategy that recognizes that people don't always need programs and institutions to serve them, and often can achieve more working together with neighbors and families to solve problems and strengthen their communities. Solving community problems takes people not just programs.

The five key questions of ABCD are:

- (1) What can residents best do by themselves,
- (2) What do they need some help from organizations to do, and
- (3) What do organizations do best?
- (4) What can we stop doing because people can do it by themselves?
- (5) What can we offer to community to support their actions?

Too often organizations only ask the third question and do work *for* or *to* communities without doing work *with* communities. Building relationships (i.e., social capital), leadership, and engagement strengthens communities. It creates a healthier, more vibrant context for other strategies to succeed, and contributes to that success.

Recognize that community residents and intended beneficiaries have assets – experience, knowledge, skills, talents, passions, and relationships – that are often overlooked and untapped contributors to impact results.

The distinction here is seeing community members not as just sources of input or feedback but as part of the outcome-production system in communities. The woman who checks in on all the young mothers in the neighborhood is contributing to health outcomes. The young adult who watches out for younger kids in the neighborhood is contributing to youth development outcomes.

Typically, we only think of nonprofits and government services when we think of who is needed to serve a community and solve a problem. We need to see those closest to people, neighborhoods, and issues being served as assets who are producers - not just consumers - of service. **Ignoring and neglecting those assets is a form of bias.**

The goal of any effort should not be strong programs but strong communities – the only change that is truly sustainable.

¹ The Asset Based Community Development Institute is the best resource on this work www.abcdinstitute.org. Thank you to Dan Duncan of Clear Impact & ABCD Institute for his help on this. Family Independence Initiative is a great example of resident-directed impact www.fiinet.org

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What is the story you tell about your work in the community (think about reports, proposals, presentations)? What roles do community members play in your story?

How do community members already contribute to your impact/result outside of any formal initiative/project? How do community members help each other here?

How can you support more leadership, engagement, and connection of community members as partners in producing your impact/result?

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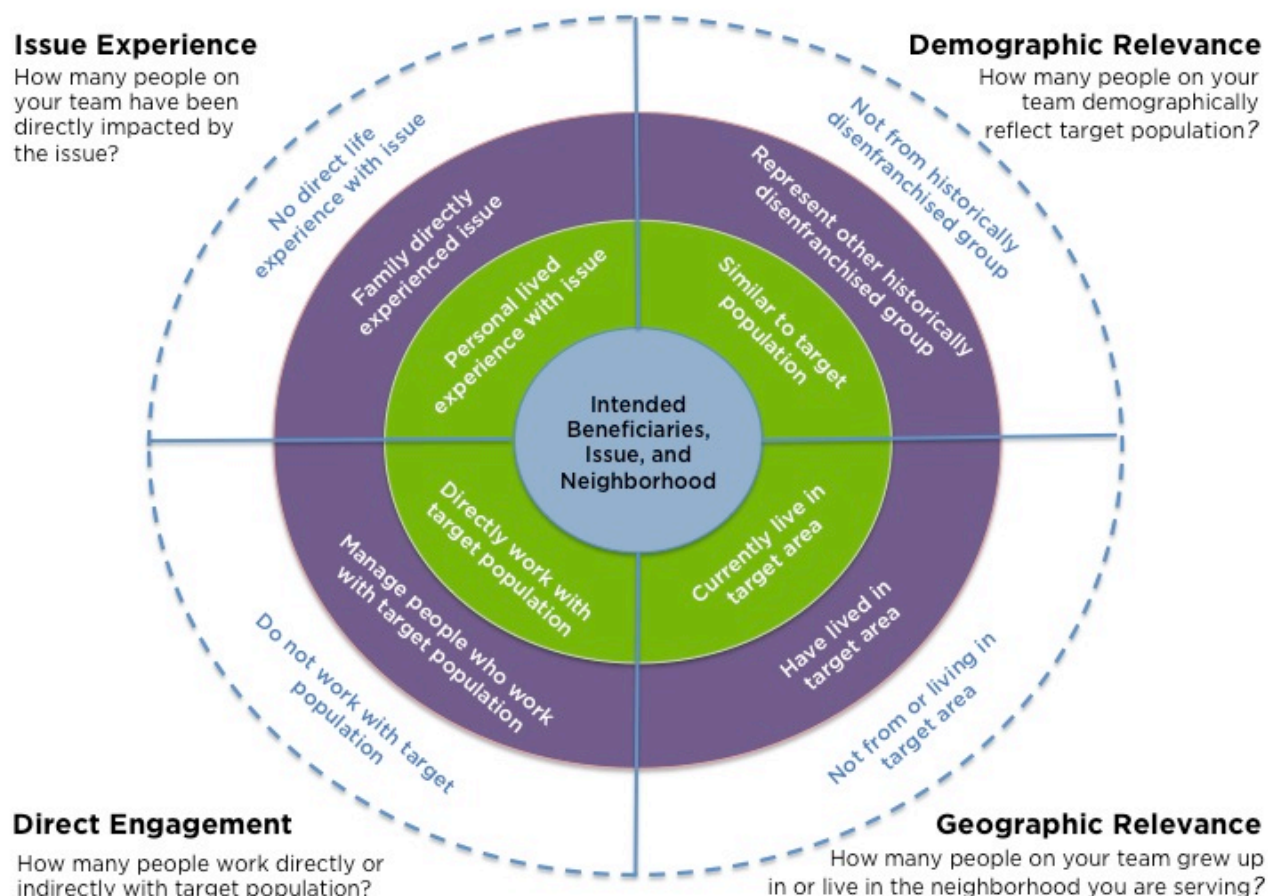
T4: Equity – Who is at our Tables?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Defined¹

- **Diversity:** Engaging people with different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and recognizing the differences as assets to learning and innovation.
- **Inclusion:** Authentic and empowered participation, a true sense of belonging.
- **Equity:** Recognizing that everyone does not start at the same place, so some people will need different resources or support to achieve the same outcome. The goal is to eliminate disparities and level the playing field.

Assess your tables

Understanding who is on your team or committee in these ways can help you identify what strengths and gaps you have in terms of experience and context expertise about the intended beneficiaries, issues, and neighborhoods you serve. If the majority of your team is in the outer circle, you need to address equity at your table and your need for community engagement is more acute.



¹ *7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014 is a great resource for this work.

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Please map your core team, board, or steering committee based on where individuals are on the map.

Map your Core Team/Committee	Direct Relevance	Secondary Relevance	Limited Relevance
Demographic Background			
Geographic Relevance			
Direct Engagement			
Issue Experience			

Do you feel you have the right mix of actors involved to understand the population, issue, and neighborhoods you wish to help?

What gaps are at your tables? What steps could you take to correct for that?

[examples of steps include adding people to your committee, hiring people, forming an advisory group, seeking professional support, and partnering with other groups]

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T5: Equity – Testing Assumptions & Bias

Correcting for Blind Spots, Improving Results

One reason we need equity at our tables is to have individuals' experiential or context expertise about beneficiaries, issues, and neighborhoods inform and lead our decision-making. Data is information about people's lives, and we must engage that expertise to use that data well. We must also surface how privilege or bias or lack of community engagement creates blind spots or distorts the lens by which we assess and decide on information.

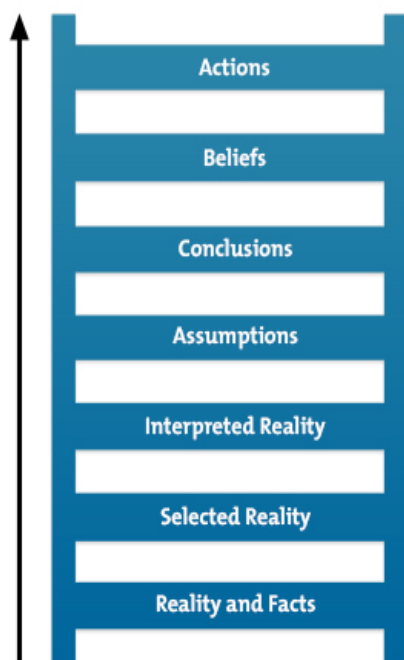
Understanding Disparities and Root Causes

It is important to understand what disparities show up in the population, issue, and neighborhoods we are serving. It is especially important to understand the historical context of policies, bigotry, discrimination, and other causes of those disparities, as well as to understand how existing systems, structures, and practices maintain or exacerbate them today. [Discuss these issues directly and transparently.](#)

Implicit bias and The Ladder of Inference

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Research demonstrates that even those who believe they do not hold biases, still have views and judgments shaped by implicit biases based on their experience, culture, and preferences. It is important to note that:

- Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them;
- They are related but distinct from explicit biases;
- Our implicit biases tend to favor our own in-group;
- They are malleable and can be surfaced and un-learned¹



Chris Argyris' **Ladder of Inference**¹ recognizes how we move from data/reality to action. We often move very quickly from data to decisions with our implicit biases influencing our selection of data, interpretations, assumptions, and conclusions. If we don't have equity at our table – intended beneficiaries and their families, friends, and neighbors – then the data we select, the ways we interpret it, the assumptions we make, and the conclusions we draw will be distorted by our privilege or that lack of knowledge.

¹ Adapted from the Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University
www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu

Have we tested our interpretations and assumptions about our work with diverse stakeholders?

How might our perspective on the people, issue, or neighborhood be distorted? What don't we know that is important for our result?

What conversation do we need to have to (a) discuss disparities and their causes and (b) surface our blind spots regarding privilege and bias?

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T6: Assessing Audiences

Think about the following groups and roles they can play in your initiative. How will our initiative and results benefit from their engagement? Why should they care about this effort? How will they benefit from participating, how will it meet their interests?

Audiences	What unique contributions can they make?	Why do they care?	How will they benefit from participating?
Intended Beneficiaries			
Families of Intended Beneficiaries			
Neighbors of Intended Beneficiaries			

Faith Leaders

Civic Leaders/
Grass Tops
Influencers

Volunteers

General Public

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T7: Approaching Audiences

Prioritize the audiences that most directly support your results. Approach distinct audiences differently, understanding their culture, interests, assets, and contributions. Don't assume, ask different community members in each audience!

Priority Audience 1:

Define the priority audience (be very specific)	
What do they care most about? What are they most concerned about?	
Why do they care about our goals?	
How have you engaged this group to date? How engaged are they?	
What do you want them to do?	
What barriers might they face to engaging with you?	
What is best way to approach and engage them?	

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Priority Group 2:

Define the priority audience (be very specific)	
What do they care most about? What are they most concerned about?	
Why do they care about our goals?	
How have you engaged this group to date? How engaged are they?	
What do you want them to do?	
What barriers might they face to engaging with you?	
What is best way to approach and engage them?	

Fill out for any additional audiences important to your result.
The United Way of Metropolitan Chicago has great tools and processes for this work.

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T8: Tips for Orienting & Supporting Successful Engagement

“If we commit to engaging community members, we have to set them up for success. We have to orient them to our world and engage in theirs.” – Angela Frusciante, William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund

1. **Clarify and communicate purpose.** Be clear that community members and grass roots leaders are assets to your initiative who you need to achieve better results. It is important that everyone at the table share and commit to this view. It is important that community members understand their value and their roles, and that they are not tokenized.
2. **Meet them where they are.** Consider community members’ and grass roots leaders’ interests, needs, and possible barriers to participation. Identify ways to accommodate them and make it easier to participate. Consider where meetings and forums are held and meeting times. Some groups offer transportation, food, child care, and even compensation (professionals are paid for their time attending these meetings so why not community members). Partner with groups that have high engagement and support them to connect you with their audiences.
3. **Orient and prepare community members for success.** Understand what community members and grass roots leaders’ interests and needs are for participating. Ensure that they understand:
 - Share what decisions were made to date, why, how, and by whom – make clear which decisions are final and which ones may be revisited;
 - Review data and analyses that has shaped understanding of the issues and strategies and key jargon, players working on the issue;
 - Outline the big issues, opportunities, and challenges the initiative faces;
 - Clarify their roles, responsibilities, expectations, and boundaries. Recognize the distinction between being “the voice of the community” versus being “a voice of the community” – *no one person or small group of people can speak for an entire community*; and
 - Introduce them to the other members’ positions, roles, and dynamics.
4. **Acknowledge and mitigate power differentials to ensure fair treatment.** Make sure that communication is transparent and community members and grass roots leaders are invited, included, and responded to as robustly as those who lead major institutions. Ensure that institutional leaders’ interests at the table are transparent to all, and that there is not a meeting before or after the meeting that is the “real” meeting (of course there may be planning meetings or committees, but in service of the full group). Encourage institutional leaders to step back from the table to create space for community members’ voices.
5. **Facilitate inclusively.** Encourage participation, call on those who have not spoken, explain concepts that may be new to members, call out jargon, spell out acronyms, describe insider baseball when referenced. Go around the table and ask each person their view. Make sure everyone is engaged.

6. **Allow for some steam to blow.** When people's voices have been ignored and discounted and they are finally invited to be at the table, those voices are often angry, frustrated, or disappointed. The way one builds trust is to listen, acknowledge, and demonstrate (not just tell them) how things will be different. If the items above have been done, it will demonstrate that things are different and if they are not dismissed or disrespected when they voice their beliefs or grievances, they will start to feel more valued. This is another patient urgency moment. If people are stuck in the anger and grievances, it does not move you toward your result, but if you create space to voice and address those anger and grievances it can accelerate the trust necessary to achieve results.

Identify what action steps you will take to practice these tips in your engagement.

TIP	ACTION STEPS
Clarify/Communicate Purpose	
Meet them Where They Are	
Orient/Prepare for Success	
Mitigate Power Differences	
Facilitate Inclusively	
Allow for Steam Blowing	

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T9: Building Partnerships, Starting Local

“[When working with grantees to improve performance or bring a new service in], we assess the state of an organization’s relationships. What level of trust does the organization have within their community. If that trust is high, we’ll build capacity and partner with them.”

– Nicole Angresano, United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County

When identifying partners to implement programs and services to achieve your results, start local. It may be enticing to approach a shiny, national model program or a program from another part of the community and import it. First, one should assess if there (a) are other programs or organizations in the specific community providing similar services already; (b) if there are organizations or programs that have strong community trust that could expand programming to include it; and (c) if community residents and partners see the new program or imported group as an asset they welcome. Whether the best strategy turns out to be building capacity of existing providers, bringing in a new provider, or both, doing the work to make sure it is trusted and welcome will set it up for greater success.

	List Organizations	How might you partner with them?
Organizations that currently work on your result with intended beneficiaries		

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Organizations that serve the specific geographic neighborhoods		
Organizations most trusted by intended beneficiaries (How do you know?)		

“Organizations don’t collaborate, people do, based on common purpose, trust, and relationships.”
-- Dan Duncan, Clear Impact.

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T10: Patient Urgency & Momentum

The drive to move urgently to address social challenges is understandable. But the investment of time on engagement up front saves a much bigger investment of time later if there is distrust or conflict in the community. If you see community engagement as necessary to achieve better results, you will allow the time to do it right and avoid the short-cuts that often backfire in the long run.

This is why community engagement requires “patient urgency.” We must be patient to build relationships, agree upon goals, align on strategies and tactics, orient and develop people where needed, resolve conflicts and differences, and engage in more democratized decision making. At the same time, we must pursue actions that build momentum that improves peoples’ lives. And we must provide elected officials and grantmakers signs of momentum so they may continue to champion the work. If we are clear and in agreement on our results, we can ensure that our engagement is directed toward advancing our results and not an exercise in work avoidance.

This is not a tension to solve, but a tension to hold. You will make trade-offs in each direction. You should be clear what those are, name them, and be clear that those trade-offs are in service to the larger goal.

“You have to give folks who are ready to run work that will keep them energized, and [you have to] give others time to absorb change and build trust in the process. It takes patience and relationships to make it work.” – Monique Baptiste-Good, Strong Healthy Communities Initiative, Newark

What work will you need to slow down in order to advance community engagement?

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What might you have to trade off in the short term?

How do we ensure that our patient engagement is advancing our result?

Are there some early wins you can achieve during the engagement process that will build momentum and build collaborative muscles for bigger goals?

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T11: Capacity Building

Build Capacity to Support Engagement

Community Engagement Strategies must be invested in and supported to succeed. After working through the previous activities, identify what capacities will be necessary to implement your engagement strategy.

Staff Time	
Skill Sets	
Organizational Culture Change	
Training of Governance Body, Leadership, Staff, Volunteers	
Professional Support/ Partnerships	

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T12: Change Management

Undertaking a robust community engagement strategy will have implications for your ***governance body, staff, partners, beneficiaries, and other current stakeholders***. It will also require management of expectations among those you wish to engage. Key elements of a thoughtful change management process include:

- Signal changes early so individuals can prepare for them;
- Focus less on expressing excitement about new practices and change than on showing empathy for the concerns of various constituencies;
- Disclose how and why decisions were made and by whom;
- Acknowledge that there will be trade-offs and losses in change, and explain why they are a necessary consequence of the strategy;
- Clearly describe the transition process for people and groups that are willing and able to move toward new framework.¹

What in your organizational structure, culture, and relationships will change? Who will experience loss? Describe how you will manage change for various stakeholder groups internally and externally.

Stakeholder Groups	What will change for them?	How will we manage change?

¹ The best resource for this is ***The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*** by Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky.

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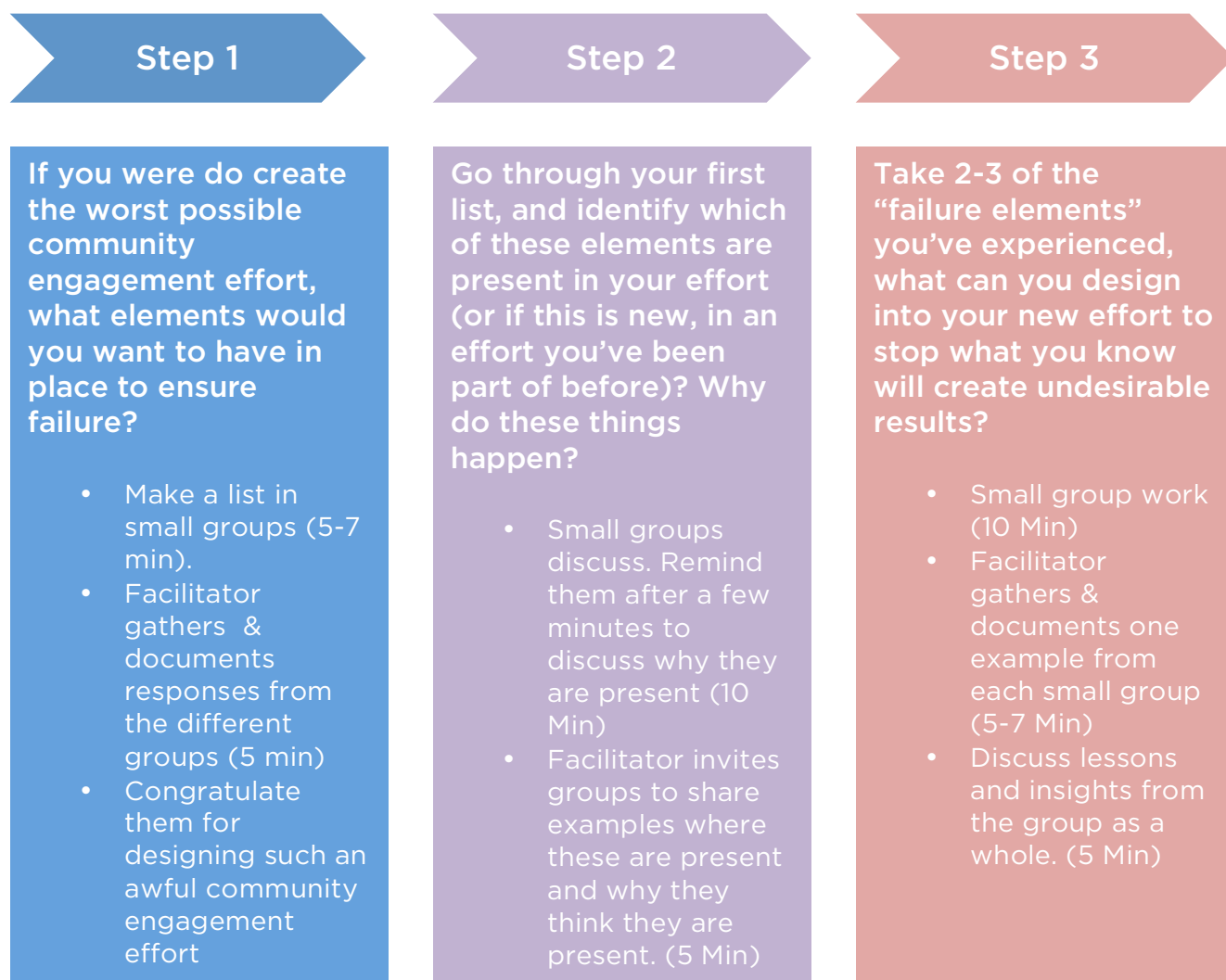
Stakeholder Groups	What will change for them?	How will we manage change?

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Appendix 1: Getting Started with TRIZ

Through the Collective Impact Forum and FSG, I was introduced to an activity that they used from Liberating Structures¹ called TRIZ. This is an adapted version that may be a fun and informative way to begin a conversation with your group about community engagement. You begin by breaking your group up into small groups and inviting them to design a community engagement effort to fail. After you gather examples from group, you ask them which of those elements are present in your current engagement or lack thereof. After they identify those things, you then ask them what elements they can put in place to ensure those “failure elements” are not present.

The important thing with this activity is to introduce one step at a time. Everyone has a lot of fun during the first step. When the second step is introduced, people are often surprised by the subterfuge and they start going deeper.



¹ You can find the original version here: <http://www.liberatingstructures.com/6-making-space-with-triz/>

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Appendix 2: Work Plan

1. **Clarify purpose for community engagement and how it will contribute to better results.** Revisit the first worksheet and re-assess how engagement will support each of your goals/outcomes.
2. **Identify your Community Engagement Strategy.** Along the community engagement spectrum, identify your strategy, communicate it, and fulfill promises made to the community.
3. **Practice Asset-Based Community Development.** Consider roles community residents and grass roots leaders can play as leaders and partners in your effort. Then begin building relationships to engage them.
4. **Build equity at your tables.** Assess the degree to which your teams bring contextual expertise about the population, neighborhoods, and issues you serve. What gaps exist?
5. **Test assumptions and biases.** Test your interpretations of data, assumptions, and conclusions with diverse stakeholders. Consider how your perspective might be biased or distorted, and how you might surface that?
6. **Assess potential audiences for engagement.** Consider how each group could support results, why they care, and how they would benefit from participating?
7. **Approach priority audiences.** Specifically identify who you will engage and evaluate how you can meet them where they are, engage their assets, and overcome their barriers to participation.
8. **Review Engagement Tips.** What action steps will you take to ensure that those you engage feel valued and set up for success?
9. **Build Partnerships, Start Local:** Who else is already contributing to the result? Who has relationships in the community that we could engage and build on?
10. **Practice patient urgency and build momentum.** What will you need to slow down or trade-off to advance your goals, and what early wins can you achieve?
11. **Build Capacity:** What capacities will you need to build and investments will you need to make to practice engagement?
12. **Change Management.** What will be implications of your engagement for current stakeholders? What change management practices will you need to implement?

After working through the first 12 Tools, what are the next steps you will take to advance your engagement?

Actions	Importance to Results	Decisions/Capacity Needed	Date to be Completed