Sharing Power with Communities Toolkit: Starting Out and Making the Case

The resources offered in this toolkit are designed to guide nonprofit organizations, foundations, and folks working in the social sector in their pursuit of sharing power and resources with the communities they seek to serve. Toolkit resources include practical tips and guides for making the case along with facilitation guides and models for getting started.

Groundwork

There are many things you don't need to wait for — like showing up at community events, cultivating relationships with community members, asking questions, and listening and integrating feedback when you receive it. And there are some things it can help to discuss with your team before you engage community members in your work. Here's some groundwork you might do inside your organization before kicking off anything big.

Know your 'why.'

Why does your organization want to do this? Is it to gather feedback from the community? To keep the community informed? To invite community members to co-design a solution? To give them more decision-making power? Be honest with yourselves. Your ultimate vision might be more aspirational than your current reasons; acknowledge both your current reality and what you aspire to.

Understand history.

What are community members' perceptions of your organization? Do you have the credibility you need to ask community members to engage with you? If not, what do you need to do to begin building credibility? How have they already been asked to engage with you? Avoid duplication by understanding who has been recently engaged and how. Understand and acknowledge ways your organization has broken trust in the past, and take steps to proactively rebuild trust in ways that center what the community wants.

Understand what the community wants.

Do they want a relationship with you? How do they want to interact? If there is a history of broken trust, what is required to rebuild trust?

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Align your team and leadership.

Work with key decision-makers inside your organization to understand the parameters. What's on and off the table? What staff and financial resources are available? What do they need to commit to before you engage the community? Who is making decisions, and how will those decisions be made? For example, your organization's leaders might point to a budget deficit that influences how many community members you can compensate this fiscal year. Or you might discover team members' resistance to engaging community members, which might mean you need to spend more time helping staff see the value and urgency of this work.

Examine your biases.

What assumptions does your organization hold about this community? How might these assumptions show up in your work with them?

Decide whether to hire a facilitator.

While it's critical that staff have personal relationships with community members, it's also helpful to have designated facilitators when groups of community members come together. Those facilitators might be staff members or hired consultants.

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