

TIME: 60 minutes
TYPE OF ACTIVITY Modeling/Demonstration Consensus Building
ACTIVITY CATEGORY Communication/Facilitation Activity Planning Relationships/Partnerships
TARGET AUDIENCE Line Staff; can also be facilitated with young people. See “What Matters to Young People: Instructions for Facilitation with Youth”
OBJECTIVES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will learn a technique for identifying the issues most important to young people. • Participants will learn a technique to help a group of young people build consensus.
MATERIALS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Index cards • Markers • Tape • Small stickers • “What Matters to Young People: Instructions for Facilitation with Youth” handout (optional)

ACTIVITY

identifying what matters to young people

procedure

INTRODUCTION

Tell the group that it is important to involve young people in planning action projects, but that agreeing on a project focus can be challenging. Tell them that the technique that will be modeled in this activity is a way to build consensus and start the planning process.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Ask the group, “How do you define community?” Take a few responses, and try to move the group toward a definition of community that all members can agree upon. The definition might be a school community, a block, a neighborhood, or an entire city or town.

Give each participant a stack of index cards and a marker. Ask everyone to think of answers to the question “How can we improve our community?” Ask for volunteers to share a few answers off the tops of their heads. If participants struggle, tell them that answers can be specific project ideas (like giving workshops on “going green” to elementary school classes) or more general concepts (like cleaning up litter in their community). Have participants write down their ideas, one idea per index card.

Give participants a few minutes to write down ideas. Then ask everyone to come to the front of the room and tape the cards up on the blackboard or wall.

Next, tell participants to look at all of the ideas written on the cards and, *without speaking*, move the cards into clusters of similar ideas grouped together. Explain that not everyone will agree on where the cards should go, and that cards may get moved more than once. Give the group a few minutes to do this. When you think everyone has finished, or when time is up, ask participants to return to their seats.

Pick one cluster of cards to begin with and read all of the ideas in the cluster out loud to the group. Ask participants if they can all agree that the cards belong together. If there are strong objections, move cards around until everyone seems satisfied. Once the group seems comfortable with the cluster, ask participants to come up with a title (or category) for this cluster. For instance, if all of the cards in a cluster are related to the environment, “environment” might be the title. As long as it seems relevant, any title is okay. Write the title down on another index card, and tape it above the corresponding cluster.

Repeat this process for each cluster. Continue to move any cards that seem out of place, based on feedback from the group. Make sure to give each cluster a title.

Once the group is satisfied, explain that participants will now have a chance to vote on which category to focus on. Give each participant 4–5 small stickers. Tell them that each sticker counts as one vote. They will vote by placing a sticker on the card with the name of the category they are most interested in (not on specific cards within that cluster). They may vote for a particular category as many times as they like, even using all of their stars on one category if they like.

Allow participants to vote, then tally the votes and announce the results.

identifying what matters to young people *(continued)*

DEBRIEF

Explain that the group now has a focus for planning an action project. The cards within the cluster are ideas to use as jumping-off points, or participants can create new ideas related to the chosen category.

CLOSING

! key point

- Explain that this activity is not only a useful tool for reaching consensus, but also a starting point for helping young people make connections between issues that concern them locally and the broader global impact of those issues.

FACILITATION WITH YOUTH

Discuss the use of this consensus-building process with young people. Ask participants to share some ideas about how they might facilitate this process with young people. What could staff do to make an activity like this appropriate for various age groups?

Explain that the next step in the process would be to brainstorm a list of activity ideas and vote on them in a similar way until a specific project has been chosen. Tell participants that detailed directions for conducting this activity with youth can be found in the handout “What Matters to Young People: Instructions for Facilitation with Youth.”

MATERIALS

- Index cards
- Markers
- Tape
- Small stickers

HANDOUT

what matters to young people: instructions for facilitation with youth

Below are some suggestions for facilitating the activity “What Matters to Young People” with young people in your program. This activity is a helpful tool for brainstorming and selecting project ideas.

PROCEDURE

Explain that you’re going to lead the group in an activity to create a list of topics for an action project that the group will do together. Everyone’s opinion will be heard, and at the end of the activity, the group will end up with a list of specific project ideas to choose from.

To begin, ask the group, “How do you define community?” Discuss whether we think of our community as our school, a block we live on, a whole neighborhood, or an entire city or town. Move the group toward a definition of community that is inclusive of all participants.

Give each participant a stack of index cards and a marker. Ask everyone to think of answers to the question “How can we improve our community?” Ask for volunteers to give a few answers off the tops of their heads. If they struggle, tell them that answers can be specific project ideas (like giving workshops on “going green” to elementary school classes) or more general ideas (like cleaning up public spaces). Have participants write down several ideas, one idea to an index card.

Give participants a few minutes to write down their ideas. Then ask everyone to come to the front of the room and tape the cards up on the board or wall.

Next, tell participants to look at all of the ideas on the cards and, *without speaking*, move the cards into clusters of similar ideas grouped together. Explain that not everyone will agree on where the cards should go, and that cards may get moved more than once. Give the group a few minutes to do this. When you think everyone has finished, or when time is up, ask participants to return to their seats.

Pick one cluster of cards to begin with and read all of the ideas in the cluster out loud to the group. Ask participants if they can all agree that the cards belong together. If there are strong objections, move cards around until everyone seems satisfied. Once the group seems comfortable with the cluster, ask participants to come up with a title (or category) for this cluster. For instance, if all of the cards in a cluster are related to the environment, then “environment” might be the title. As long as it seems relevant, any title is okay. Write the title down on another index card, and tape it above the corresponding cluster.

Repeat this process for each cluster. Continue to move any cards that seem out of place, based on feedback from the group. Make sure to give each cluster a title.

Once the group is satisfied, explain that each person will now have a chance to vote on which category to focus on. Give each participant 4–5 small stickers. Tell them that each sticker counts as one vote. They will vote by placing a sticker on the card with the name of the category they are most interested in (not on specific cards within that cluster). They may vote for a particular category as many times as they like, even using all of their stars on one category if they like.

what matters to young people: instructions for facilitation with youth *(continued)*

Allow participants to vote, then tally the votes and announce the results. Explain that the group now has a focus for planning an action project. The cards within the cluster are ideas to use as jumping-off points, or the group can create new ideas related to the chosen category.

Next, brainstorm a list of activity ideas and vote on them in a similar way until a specific project has been chosen.

DEBRIEF

If anyone is feeling left out or disappointed that their preferred topic or project idea wasn't selected, reassure them that the group may end up doing more than one project. Encourage young people to take action on their own as well. Perhaps they can bring their project idea to other youth groups they are involved with outside your program. Just because this group isn't doing a particular project, it doesn't mean that individual young people (and their friends) can't decide to take action on their own! Encourage young people to take responsibility for acting on the issues they care about

Ask the group what it was like to participate in the brainstorming process. Was it fun? Was it frustrating? Why? Ask why they think you did this activity with them, rather than just telling them what the project would be. Elicit the idea that it is important for young people to have a choice in the kinds of projects they do after school and to determine how they can make a difference in the world around them. Remind them that your role as the adult is to be supportive and help guide them to explore the topics they are interested in, but not to take control.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- As an alternative to using index cards as described above, young people could take photographs, make artwork, or make a collage of images that illustrates the need for improvement in their community (however they choose to define it).
- Young people could do a poetry slam as a fun way to get into the question of how to improve their community. They could begin their poems by using a prompt like "My community needs ..." (a bath, trash cans, a safe way to walk to school, Internet, a bus, me).