



River of Life Facilitation Guide

Purpose

- To build trust in a group
- To increase the knowledge of different experiences that inform perspectives of the group

Materials

- Paper for each participant – at least 11” by 14”
- Assortment of art supplies, e.g., markers, glitter, stickers, popsicle sticks, glue

Background

Citizen Action of New York introduced this activity during Session I of the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change program.

Each person has a rich life story with hard places and great celebrations. Taking the time to hear those stories increases the appreciation for what individuals have gone through and how their experiences have shaped their responses to different situations.

As a group is forming, it is also important for each individual to feel seen and be heard. Creating time for the group to do this will increase the ability of the group to trust each other and to understand the gifts and talents that are available to the whole team. Even in settings where people worked together for some time, this activity is likely to increase the level of understanding in the group.

Facilitation Instructions and comments

People love to tell stories so this is generally a very easy way for people to get to know each other. Making this fun also helps. During the sharing time, it is important that people really listen to each other. This may mean discouraging questions and comments until the whole group has finished telling their stories. This exercise can take 30 minutes or 2 hours.

1. Ask participants to reflect on their lives.

“You are now going to create a picture that reflects the river of your life. As with a river, your life has a certain flow. There are times when a river is rushing and flowing over the banks and times when the river goes over the rapids and the rocks. At other times, the river moves slowly within its banks towards the destination. Take a few minutes to consider where you have been and what has happened to you that has been very significant in shaping the direction of your life. There are art supplies here to use to make your picture as colorful as you are. On a piece of paper, please create a picture that describes the journey that has brought you to this time and place. You will have 15 minutes to create your picture.”



2. Once participants have completed their rivers, ask them to share their journeys. Allow enough time for everyone to fully share. If you have a large group, you may want to have participants break into small teams of 5-7 people to ensure that all stories are heard.

“We will now share our rivers of life. Please give each person talking your full attention and hold your questions or comments until we are all done. Please tell us about your journey and what the images represent in your life.”

3. When all the stories are done, you can do a large group debrief of the experience. Questions you can ask include:
 - What was it like for you to tell your story to this group?
 - What was it like for you to hear all of these stories?
 - What surprised you?
 - What insights have you gained about our group?