

ACTIVITY 2

Stories to Systems. Part 1: Passion Talks

TIMING

This exercise takes **8–10 minutes**/person. At NLN this exercise takes the majority of the second day.

EXPERTISE

None. As long as the group has spent time establishing confidentiality and “community agreements,” this exercise is one that is created for and by the community.

PURPOSE

To build a rough “systems map” from the stories of NLN leaders and demonstrate that local systems are a creation of both individual and collective beliefs and behaviors.

USE

This two-part exercise helps connect personal stories and passions to complex community issues and systems. It’s also a great way to have leaders present their work in a way that builds connections between them.

FACILITATION

Pre-work: Prior to gathering, leaders receive instructions to prepare a 5-minute talk about a community issue they care passionately about and are working on. We ask them: “Don’t just tell us about your job. Tell us what you are trying to change in your community.” Leaders can use a visual or handout, but we forgo projections to save time. We use these questions as prompts:

- What is the key issue facing your community that you are seeking to solve?
- What are the obstacles and challenges to success?
- What does the future look like if we succeed?
- What do you need to be more successful?

What’s needed: A comfortable room that can hold a circle of chairs for the participants, a large blank wall for hanging poster-sized flip charts, two easels with flip charts, and large markers for note-taking.

Instructions:

- 1 Introduce the purpose of the Passion Talk and the prompts.
- 2 Choose the speaking order by drawing numbers and give people the opportunity to trade if they want.
- 3 Give participants expectations on timing. Each speaker gets 5 minutes, with a warning at 4 minutes.
- 4 Tell participants that facilitators will take notes on flip-chart paper as they speak, and then post these on the wall.



Instructions (continued):

- 5 After each leader speaks, the group asks questions and provides feedback for 2–3 minutes.
- 6 Participants are invited to add additional thoughts and questions to the notes on the wall.
- 7 This “wall of stories” (with the posted summaries) grows with each talk. By the end, the group has a full picture of all their stories and local issues they are working on.
- 8 After the talks are finished, break into small groups and invite the leaders to reflect on how they have been personally affected.

Note: Creating the “wall of stories” can be as simple as transcribing key phrases from a leader’s talk; examples of how to capture the Passion Talks are available on our website. Make sure that you have thick markers, and that you highlight that person’s name at the top of the page for easy identification

WHAT WE’RE LEARNING

- ✓ After the last talk, we refrain from immediate sense making to give people time to reflect in small groups before moving on to systems mapping (Part 2).
- ✓ As with the 3-minute introductions, groups typically need a short break every 60–90 minutes; movement, caffeine, or brief walks are good ways to renew the group’s energy.
- ✓ This exercise also provides insight into leaders’ capabilities. Can they switch elevations on the challenges they are addressing? Can they communicate effectively? Do they struggle to articulate what they need to achieve greater impact? These talks give the facilitators a sense of what is needed both for individuals and the group.

DON’T JUST TELL US

ABOUT YOUR JOB. TELL US WHAT

YOU ARE TRYING TO CHANGE

IN YOUR COMMUNITY