

Designing the Future of the Network

Purpose: To generate a collective understanding of what leaders have learned and what they intend to carry forward into their next chapter

Timing: Allot at least 90 minutes for this session

Expertise: None. As long as the group has spent time establishing confidentiality and “community agreements,” this exercise is created for and by the group. One person in the group should be designated as the facilitator.

Use: At NLN, we use this toward the end of a cohort’s intensive six months together as part of their “graduation” into the bigger network, but it could be used with any group approaching a shift in their work together.

Facilitation:

Pre-work: The facilitation team gets clear on the guiding questions most pertinent to the group’s future. For NLN, we typically use these prompts:

- What would be the most impactful thing this network could do to change the future of this community?
- What work (projects, advocacy, existing initiatives) should this network take on?
- How might we support one another’s leadership in the community?
- How would you describe the unconscious intention and emerging value set of this network?
- How might we stay connected? What does it mean to truly integrate with the other cohorts?

Each question is posted around the room on a large post-it as a way to invite easy feedback.

Instructions:

1. Introduce the purpose of the exercise: to generate a collective understanding of what the group has created and learned and to invite a vision of what the next chapter could be. Often we review a selection of

- pictures and slides from past sessions to spark an understanding of how far the group has traveled together. (5-15 minutes)
2. Invite the members to silently respond to the questions posted around the room. Leaders are given pens and Post-its and asked to write their thoughts directly on the posted questions. Tell them they do not have to answer every question, but they do need to write legibly. (10 minutes)
 3. Now ask leaders to stand before the posted question that most interests them. Make sure after the shuffle that each question is being addressed by at least two leaders. Invite the leaders to do some quick sense-making as a group to the initial responses. They should rearrange Post-its and contribute their own responses to the question. (10 minutes)
 4. Still standing in their small groups, leaders are asked to generate the answer to the question or formulate questions for their fellow network members on what additional information they need. (5 minutes)
 5. Leaders then interview one another about possible solutions and/or emerging questions. This is typically a high-energy exchange where leaders take turns eliciting quick thoughts about what has emerged in their small groups. The facilitator should encourage leaders to have multiple quick conversations versus a few deeper ones. (10 minutes)
 6. The small groups then reconvene to process what they have learned from their peers and finalize their answer to the initial question. The facilitator should ask each small group to prepare to share their findings to the full group. (10 minutes)
 7. Finally, the full group reconvenes to hear from each small group. Each presentation should allow for feedback from the full group. Allow the full group to respond to each presentation. (10 min per group)