

ACTIVITY 3

Stories to Systems. Part 2: Systems Mapping

TIMING

This session takes a **minimum of 2.5 hours** to complete.

EXPERTISE

This session requires strong facilitators with **working knowledge of systems thinking** and a degree of comfort embedding equity into the conversation.

PURPOSE

To demonstrate that leaders do not need to distance themselves from individual stories in order to act on systems, and to show that a systems map can emerge from stories of people in the room.

USE

At NLN, this exercise typically follows the Passion Talks on Day 3.

FACILITATION

Prior to this exercise, each leader has revealed his/her individual story and community issue. Now, leaders will construct a collective narrative about local community systems and begin to imagine a new future.

What's needed: The room should be open and free of tables. Small groups can cluster around easels or walls and build on the group consensus. We also use templates to help organize the group's thinking.

Instructions:

- 1 Introduce an overview of systems thinking, and the value of moving from stories (proximate to individuals) to systems (seeing the whole).
- 2 Divide into small groups of 3–4 people for 20-minute discussion of what the individual stories say about the current state of the community and larger systems. Each group should select a note-taker to record the conversation on a template or flip chart that stays at that station in the room.
- 3 Reconvene as a full group to debrief what emerged in the small group. Record this conversation as well.
- 4 Have them go back into small groups for another 20 minutes. Now, ask participants to brainstorm the ideal future state of their community. Again, a note-taker should record each conversation.
- 5 Reconvene the full group to hear what emerged in their small-group conversations, and record this.

Instructions (continued):

- 6 Reconfigure the groups so that the leaders have new brainstorming partners. Send each group to a different station around the room to brainstorm how they might achieve the future state described there. Invite the leaders into a moment of creativity. Ask them to record each idea, both big and small, on a Post-it or worksheet.
- 7 Reconvene the full group to hear their favorite strategies for attaining the future state of their community/system.
- 8 To close, invite reflections about the process that allowed them to collectively create this “systems map.”
- 9 Follow-up: Facilitators should collect, synthesize, and reflect back to the group the systems assessment.

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- While this session is not specifically geared to talking about equity, talking about local systems opens the door to conversations about power and privilege in the community. This can be a powerful moment for the group to wrestle with local dynamics around equity, and it requires the facilitators to create a trusting and brave space. If the conversation becomes too polite, facilitators should revisit the community agreements.

LEADERS CONSTRUCT
A COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE
ABOUT LOCAL SYSTEMS
AND BEGIN TO IMAGINE
A NEW FUTURE