

What it is

A process for allowing people concerned about an issue to ensure it is addressed in ensuing discussions

What it can do

This tool can assist you to:

- Build trust and safety in working groups and teams.
- Create confidence among team members that their fundamental needs, values, or concerns will be understood, respected, and attended to by the group as a whole.

When to use it

- In a coalition or work team where some members have important responsibilities, values, interests, or concerns not necessarily held by the group as a whole.
- This exercise requires a certain baseline level of trust. It would not be suitable in the formative stages of groups.

How it works

- Step 1** Allow a representative of the group(s) concerned about an issue to speak uninterrupted for 5-10 minutes:
- From the heart, about why they care so deeply about this issue
 - To identify the key connections between a discussion at hand and their concerns
 - To help the rest of the team understand the critical issues, interests, and needs that the individual(s) represent so that others can help make sure their needs are addressed
- Step 2** Listeners ask clarifying questions to ensure there is shared understanding.

- Step 3** Members of the group not typically identified with the issue (could be 3-5 people depending on group size) speak:
- From the heart, expressing their understanding of the issue and why it might be important for the group to stay aware of it
 - Share their personal commitment to take responsibility for making sure the issue is remembered and attended to in subsequent discussions
- Step 4** When this feels complete, invite everyone to stand together as an expression of solidarity and shared commitment to see that these concerns are well addressed in the discussions that follow. (Raising both hands in the air also works fine as a non-standing option.)

Example

This exercise was created during the building of a long-term, broad-based alliance spanning many sectors and interest groups. In discussing a broad jobs/just economy agenda, various groups kept advocating for the issues that were fundamental to their purpose and mission:

- Labor unions repeatedly keep pushing the importance of collective bargaining to a healthy middle class and national economy.
- The groups that work with poor people and people of color kept trying to make sure that the needs of these communities were kept in the forefront.
- The environmental/climate change groups kept reminding the group to make sure the jobs were green jobs, etc.

Representatives of the three sectors clearly felt concerned that some of their fundamental interests would be overlooked unless they repeatedly advocated for them.

The exercise was an important moment for the alliance. The leaders from these three sectors experienced that others:

- empathized with why they cared so deeply about these issues
- understood the interconnections of these issues to the discussions that were underway
- were committed to making sure that their concerns were named and addressed in all discussions – without them having to always be the ones to raise them

Things to consider/Facilitator tips

This is potentially a very powerful trust and alignment building exercise. It is hard for people who care deeply about an issue to feel they are alone in holding it in a group. It makes it difficult to relax and attend to others' concerns when you're on guard about protecting your interests.

To support the process as a facilitator:

- Really support the person raising their concern in speaking from their heart – to be vulnerable about why this matters so much to them. Their vulnerability evokes a natural empathic response from others.
- Help both the person presenting and the respondents to build understanding of why this issue has potential strategic and political relevance to everyone's issues.
 - It's fine that people stand for each other because they care about each other.
 - There's also an element of enlightened self-interest.
"If I care about your issue, you'll care about mine."
 - But an even more powerful alignment occurs when people understand the structural and practical relationships, intersections, and synergies between their issues.
- This process can provide a breakthrough in the Hearts & Minds of group participants.
- It needs to be followed up with reminders and check-ins to make sure it gets translated into ongoing behavior.