

CRAFTING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Purpose of this Discussion:

Positive, strengths-based, open-ended questions can all be useful ways to engage with colleagues, clients, volunteers and boards. Asking “why” questions prompts people to make connections, identify patterns, and explore new ideas. Learning the art of crafting questions that open up creative thinking and new ideas is an important way to ensure that conversation isn’t inadvertently shut-down. This agenda and worksheet can help you delve deeper into new questions for your organization to ask about its mission, theory of change and program design.

Hoped-For Outcomes:

- Identify opportunities to introduce questions that could lead to breakthrough thinking and innovation in your organization
- Generate a list of concrete questions that can be proposed to others in the organization
- Reframe questions that are already being asked so that they are the right ones (i.e. not misleading, blaming, narrowing, etc.)

90-MINUTE AGENDA AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**Round of Introductions and Personal Reflection 15 min**

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following prompt:

Describe a time when someone asked you a question that caused you to have an “a ha” moment.

Note: You may want to write down answers on a flipchart for everyone to see and remember.

Explore Questions about the Mission Statement 15 min

As a group, brainstorm answers to the following questions:

Looking at our organization’s mission statement, what questions does it seem to be answering?

Does our mission explain why we do what we do? Does it explain why there is a need in our community for us to do what we do? Does it explain the root cause of the need that exists in our community?

Crafting Powerful Questions Exercise 55 min

(15 min) Break the group into small teams of 3-4 participants and ask each team to craft a question using the “Crafting Powerful Questions” worksheet accompanying this exercise.

(15 min) Next, have the small teams report out the question they would ask. Note any commonalities in the questions that people are posing.

(25 min) As a large group reflect on the following questions to begin exploring what would be different if those questions were at the heart of the organization’s work:

How might we raise some of these questions in the organization? What difference might these questions make in our programs, theory of change and planning processes?

Where are there natural opportunities to weave these questions into our interactions with stakeholders (clients, volunteers, board, etc.)?

What different questions might we ask of clients if we were focused on the root causes of the problems and needs our programs address?

What different questions might we ask of our board and funders?

Closing and Evaluation 5 min

Ask people to identify one thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.

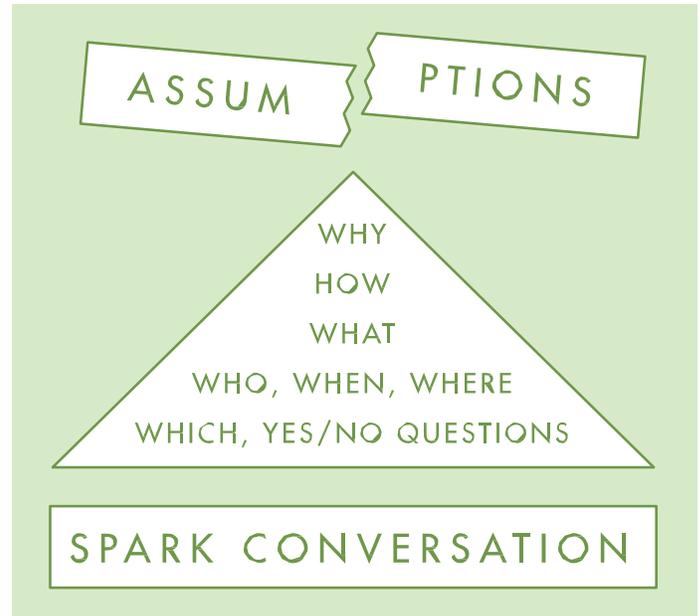
Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: If there was continued energy during this exercise, you may consider forming a group that will continue to work on this issue in your organization and plan for how to move ahead.

Crafting Powerful Questions

Powerful questions break through assumptions, change thinking and spark conversation and reflection.

The image to the right shows these principles and how the structure and wording of questions determines their power. Keeping these principles in mind, think about a powerful question that you could ask your organization about its mission and impact in the community.



What assumptions does our mission statement reflect about the problem, the population served, and how that problem should be addressed?

What kind of change do I want to spark in how we think about our service goals and activities?

How should I structure my question to best spark discussion and open up new possibilities and thinking?

The Question I would ask is:

Note: The image is adapted from “the Art of Powerful Questions” by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs, and the activity is adapted from social change goals activities in the Power Tools Manual developed by SCOPE: Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education.

