

Listening to the people

This process combines some elements of the [vision gallery](#) with a reflection on hopes for the future shared by different groups in the society; hopes and longings that activists need to listen to if they are to build a broad based movement that appeals to the people.

Objectives:

- 🕒 To identify some of the hopes and dreams of different groups in society
- 🕒 To start to create a shared vision of tomorrow

Time needed:

2.5 hours

Resources needed:

Newsprint, coloured pens, crayons, paper, string and tape or pegs (to attach the visions to).

How it's done:

1. List the key social groupings in your society (religious groups, ethnic / minority groups, media, labour and workers, professionals, teachers and students, civil servants, farmers, women, academics / intellectuals, politician, police and military).
2. Once broad categories for the groups have been listed, place chairs or cushions in a circle in the middle of the group. An equal number of chairs or cushions for each person. If you use chairs make sure the chairs are facing outwards. Write the name of each group on a piece of paper (large enough for all to see). On each chair or cushion place a name of one of the key groups in society listed previously.
3. Explain that in a moment you will invite volunteers to sit on the seats in the inner circle and speak as if they voicing the private hopes for the future of a person from that for social group. But for now you invite people to stay where they are with their eyes closed and focus on their breathing. Lead people through a body awareness and relaxation process (see the chapter on Educate the Educator for more about the closed eye exercise process). Ask people to think about those individuals and groups selected before. Mention them by name (e.g a member of a religious groups, a person from an ethnic / minority group, a journalist, a worker, a professional, a teacher, a student, a civil servant, a farmers, a woman, an academic or intellectual, a politician, a member of the police force, and a member of the military etc etc). Invite each person in the room to focus on one of these groups. At this point make sure that all the roles/groups in the circle are represented and if necessary redistribute people so that there are at least 2 people per name/role. Now invite the participants to imagine a person from that group in your mind. Who are they? What do they look like? What do they do? What are their private hopes and fears for the future? What are their interests and needs in relation to (the injustice in question)? What do they want for their children? Now imagine that they are having a private conversation with a loved one or close friend. A conversation with someone they trust and respect. Imagine that person sharing those private hopes for the future? What are they saying? What do they really feel?

Once participants are clear about the instructions invite people to position themselves on a chair or cushion. Allow people time and space to find themselves a seat then after a short period of silence to allow people to settle invite one person to speak as if they were the person named.

If a person starts focusing on the problems the facilitator can gently intervene asking questions like: What would you like things to be like? What would it be like for this person (the role they are playing) if these problems didn't exist? How would life be different? What would it look like? What would be happening if these issues (the problem) were resolved? What if this person woke up one morning and a miracle had occurred overnight, and all these problems were resolved? What would be different? What would things look like? The facilitator's role is to support people to concretely describe what someone who really was from that group might privately long for.

4. Ask people to remember what this person said and now choose a different role to focus on (list the roles). Repeat this process for two more roles.
5. Then ask people to return to their breathing, the awareness of their body and come back to the room. Explain how the exercise will work. Invite people when they are ready, to sit (or stand) in the centre of the circle, by a role that they have meditated on. Ask people to come and sit on the chair or cushion until all the chairs are taken. Explain that once there is someone to speak for each group, that each person will share the private hopes for the future that that person might share. (In the spirit of a meditative centred exercise the facilitator can demonstrate). Check that people understand the exercise. Explain that those in the inner group will share and that those in the outer group will listen to how that might help the movement formulate a vision for tomorrow that has the widest possible support. Once everyone in the inner circle has shared the inner hopes of the person they are representing, explain that you as the facilitator will invite them to hop up and move one place to the right and then reflect on the inner most hopes of this new "role" they are adopting. Give people some time to collect their thoughts before speaking. Invite them to connect with this role as a person who might join your movement. In this way the group will continue until everyone in the inner circle has spoken for all the roles. Continue the exercise until each participant has shared each of the roles. If there is time ask a new group to come into the middle. If the group is large divide the group up into groups made up of the number of roles listed. For instance if the group lists eight key groups in the society and there are 24 participants divide the group up into three smaller groups and have them all go through the exercise.

Debrief. What was that exercise like? What feelings came up? What was it like taking the role of another? Do you think some people might actually have those thoughts and feelings - hopes for the future? In what way would this practice benefit the movement? Would the movement be stronger if it started to articulate these hopes? Why? How could the movement start to do that?

6. Set up tables - one table for each group in society. On each table place newsprint markers, coloured pens and crayons. On each table place the name of one of the groups in society. On a large piece of paper write: what would be different for (this group) when you win your struggle? Now invite people to go to one of the tables and for 10 minutes, individuals spend time alone, sketching their personal visions by writing, outlining, diagramming or drawing. Ask people to draw what would be different for (this group) when they win the struggle. For instance the group that are students and teachers might draw how the education system would be different in the new society etc. Allow people to self-select which table they go to. If time permits the

facilitator could invite people to move around different tables so that everyone has a chance to contribute to developing a vision for two or more groups. Alternatively tables can be set up as mixed groups so that representatives from each group are all at one table. It is up to the facilitator to discern whether it is more important for all the participants to integrate in one group or caucus in separate role based groups. It also depends how many participants are part of this exercise.

7. Once that time is up invite people to spend the next 30-45 minutes in small clusters of 3-6 people, pooling their visions and expressing a common one on a large sheet of paper.
8. Invite groups to post their composite utopia on the wall in the main meeting room, creating a “vision gallery”. Participants look, compare, discuss and question, informally. (15-20 minutes)
9. The total group gathers to discuss what they noticed. Questions to consider about process are: What are the areas of agreement revealed in the visions? What areas need the most work in developing a viable alternative to the status quo? What concepts do individuals agree or disagree with?

If the group is an organization which might propose a vision as part of its campaign for change, the facilitator can encourage those most motivated to find each other and create a task force to pull the common ideas together, back them up with research, and present them to a constituency or as demands to power holders.

Source:

Jason MacLeod, the Change Agency combining ideas from the George Lakey and Training for Change’s “[Vision Gallery](#)” and “The Circle of Truths” developed by Janet Chisholm from the Fellowship of Reconciliation USA.

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